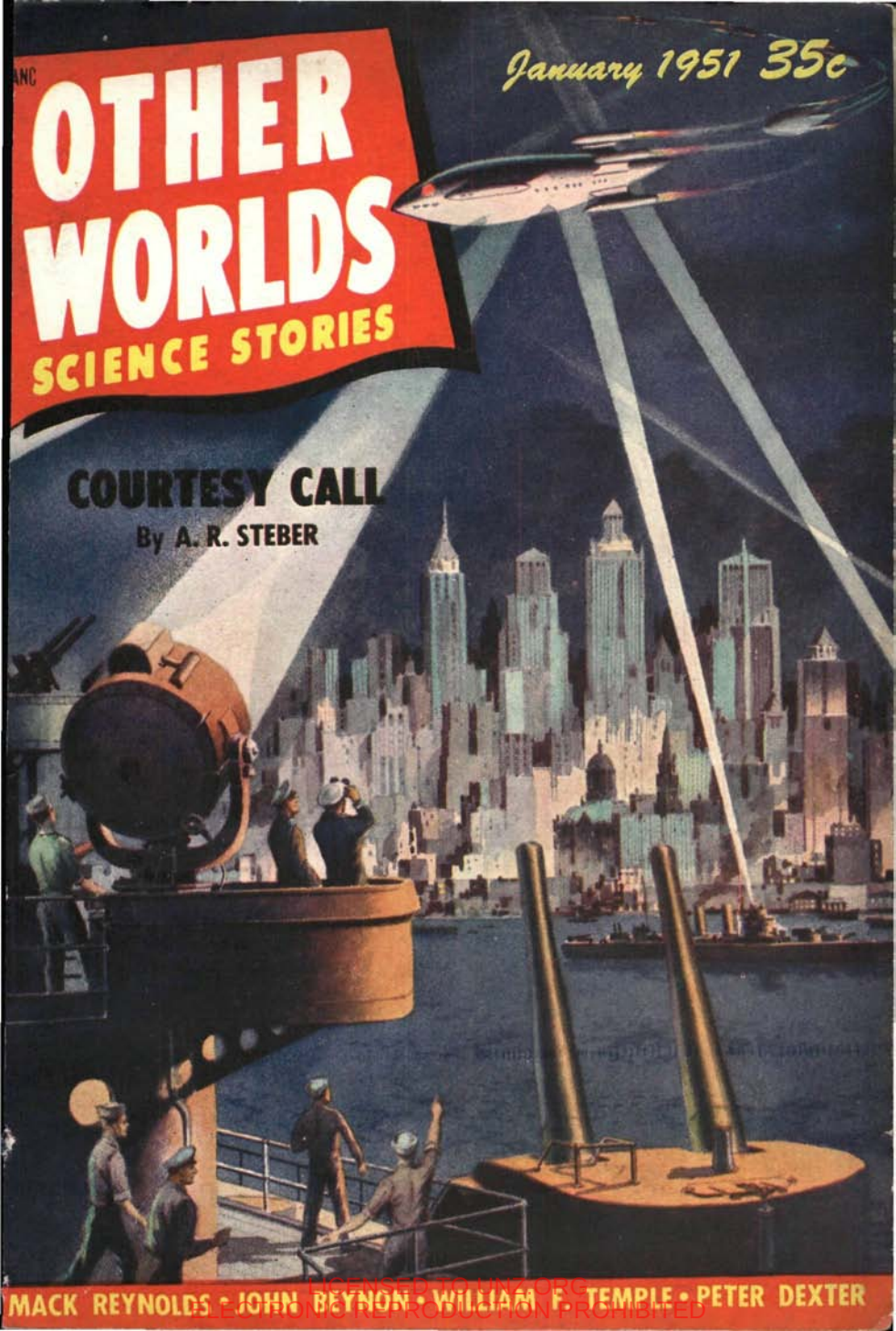

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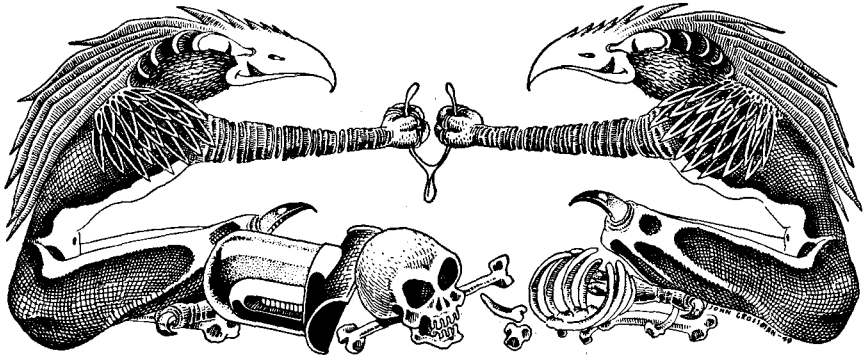

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March Issue

on Sale January 29

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EDITORIAL

THE St. Francis Hospital in Evanston has asked your editor to request his readers to discontinue sending letters to him—because he's not at the hospital any more; and how many friends have we got, anyway? Yes, it's amazing, but for four months the flood of mail has not stopped. It makes our whole accident worthwhile to find out how many people think a lot of us. And it also makes us happy to know that so many like OTHER WORLDS too! Anyway, we're back at the office and you can write us there, this time saying "congratulations on your *recovery*." Yes, your editor can now walk without his canes, and the doctors have rewritten the book on paralysis. We quote: "permanent paralysis does not work on Ray Palmer; he does not realize he can't walk." All of which means that now you can expect OTHER WORLDS to rush into high gear again, with some of the most unusual stories and ideas you've ever read. The reason for this is not yours truly, but a group of writers who have pushed some of the best stories our way we've seen in years. There are a couple of them in this issue, but we'll let *you* decide how good they are. *We* are bound to be prejudiced!

Bea Mahaffey returned from the Portland Convention with the following report: "Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas are swell guys. Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas are swell guys! Anthony Boucher and J. Francis McComas are. Now, if Bea thinks they're swell, we ought to suggest that you buy a copy of their magazine and read it—if you already haven't. It's *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction.* The reason we say this is twofold—Tony and J. Francis say they like OTHER WORLDS too! Mighty swell guys, those.

Howard Browne also returned from the convention with a lot of praise on his lips for the conventioners. He's moving *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* to New York, so's to be on hand for the next convention in New York. (Actually it's going to be in New Orleans, but Howard is looking ahead many years. He says he's looking ahead far because his enthusiastic for AS and FA go that far guy that Howard Browne.

Incidentally, we've bought from Tony and Howard! Ye will appear in OTHER WO Howard with a Tharn story! all we'll tell you now, but watch more interesting news along line. We've got a surprise in st for you—one of those ideas we we talking about.

Your editor is moving up to W consin, to his own farm, where will set up editorial offices, to e OTHER WORLDS from there. T idea is to be able to type editori with one hand, and fish for tro with the other. Nice life, if you ca get it, and we've got it!

However, the main offices will remain in Evanston, and Bea Mahaffey will continue to run the show as she has so admirably in the past four months. Marge Budwig will continue to supervise the subscription department and see that you get your magazine on time. And why haven't you subscribed, she wants to know? You save a dime, you get your magazine a week ahead of the newsstand. Another thing she wants us to tell you is that OTHER WORLDS comes out *every six weeks*. She keeps cussing at guys who write in and ask "where is my December issue?" when there ain't any. OTHER WORLDS will appear in January, March, Ap-

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ril, June, July, September, October and December during 1951. The contents page of the preceding issue will tell you the exact publication date of the following issue.

Guy name of H. L. Gold, who edits a new magazine name of *Galaxy* says as how his magazine is the only one with an adult appeal, and not publishing glorified westerns on other planets. Aw come on, Goldie, ain't you ever heard of OTHER WORLDS? Anyway, no matter —we suggest that our readers buy a copy of *Galaxy* and read it. We want our adult readers to get all the adult stuff they desire. And we ain't so uppity that we won't admit it—if you've really got it, Goldie. Only—the big fish are in the ocean, not in the stratosphere; so come on in, the water's fine in the adult, non-western science fiction field.

Sam Merwin, editor of *Thrilling Wonder* and *Startling* called us long distance the other day to tell us to watch his January issue. He says it will be something special. So, since we know Sam and know what he can do, we suggest you watch his January issue too. Remember, Sam, we threatened to inform our readers of anything good coming up anywhere in the field—and it's just one of the services we render our readers. Just so happens that the editorial is the only place we got open at this late date to tell 'em what you said.

Another outcome of the Portland Convention was a surprise to everybody. Our own Rog Phillips up and proposed to a fanette by the name of Mari Wolf, and when we asked Rog to drive us up to Wisconsin a couple of weeks ago, he surprised us by asking us to be best man at the wedding. And that's what we did—canes and all.

Rog made it a very romantic little country church in the city thing, getting married at the same where your editor got married eight years ago. So there were fond memories for yours truly as he stood at the altar listening to the great Rog repeating somebody else's lines.

Your editor had one swell job hanging onto a ring and two canes and keeping from falling flat on his face in the process.

At the wedding dinner afterward —attended by Howard Browne, Bill Hamling, to mention editors, and Bea Mahaffey and Lila Shaffer, to mention editresses, plus Charles Recour, Mrs. Browne, Mrs. Hamling, your editor and his wife—the bride was entertained with the sparkling witlessness of dyed-in-the-wool science fiction fans.

Next issue of OTHER WORLDS will give you a cover by H. W. McCauley, and the gal isn't nude. Story is by a guy named Ray Palmer. So now you'll really have a chance to boot this editor where he belongs. In the April issue is a yarn by Lester del Rey called "If Ye Have Faith," and it's an idea that Les has been trying to sell to every editor in the field, and having them scream "No, no, I'm skeered to print stories like that!" Well, we ain't skeered. Also in that issue is Robert Bloch with "The Tin You Love to Touch" and quite a few other top writers.

March issue, besides the Palmer atrocity, will contain another story by that Martian beer salesman, William Bailey (see this issue's "Skeleton Key"). Also we have a brand new contest story by Eric Frank Russell which your editor was too dumb to solve and had to write to Eric for the answer, so we are making it a contest knowing we'll be safe, and not have to give out the prizes. However, just in the remote case that some of you are smarter than we are, we'll *have* the prizes ready, only perish forbid. One thing we'll say about 'em, is you won't have to go down in a submarine or up in a balloon, if you win. Goo-bye now. . . . *Rap*

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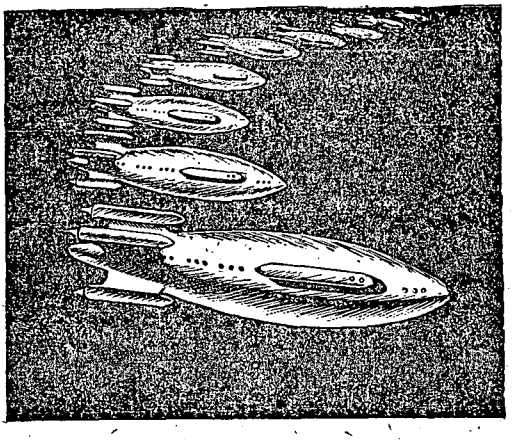

The fleet hung motionless in space, waiting — but for what?

COURTESY CALL

By A. R. Steber

An accidental twist of the television dial and a message from a spaceship came to view; but what if it wasn't an accidental twist?

"YOU won't like Lester," Hannes said, giving me his quick cheerful grin and running his dampened finger around his water glass automatically. It brought out a shrill clear note that seemed to come from everywhere except the glass that produced it.

I glanced uncomfortably at two old maids in the booth across from us—it was at Louis' on Forty-eighth, a short block and a half off Broadway—and pretended an interest in what I expected would be a lot of juicy gossip.

"Why not?" I asked the inevitable question.

"For one thing," Hannes said, still running his finger around the glass, "he's a television nut. The minute you get in the door he'll shush you and escort you into his living room on tiptoe so as to be able to hear the radio. That isn't so bad, but he lives in one of those crummy walkups so old they still get their electricity from the original direct current dynamoes. As a consequence he has to have an oscillator to provide the alternating current, and just try synchronizing that with the broadcasting stations.

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He can't hold the picture for more than ten seconds at a time."

"That sounds intriguing," I said.

Hannes paused in his glass strumming, not having expected me to react that way.

"That's only half of it," Hannes said. "Or I *should* say, not quite half of it. He has typewriters."

"Oh?" I said, dipping into the ministrone.

"A semi-electric thing with a carriage four feet long," he said darkly. "Works like a turret emplacement on a battleship. You have to wear earmuffs and a chest protector to operate it. Oh, you'll see it work before you escape from that place. He's got a Belgian machine too. Prewar."

He shuddered and drank his tomato juice in one gulp.

"Dangerous?" I suggested.

"Physically, no," Hannes said, beginning his glass strumming once more and ignoring the dark glances of the two old ladies as they rose and stamped toward the exit. "Did you ever wonder why I'm an artist?"

"Yes!" I said brightly.

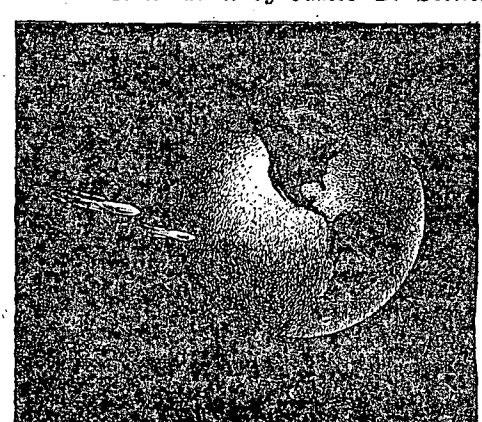
The sarcasm was lost on him. "Most people do after they see my work," he said sadly. "I used to be a typist in a restaurant. Type out the menus. That sort of thing. Not much pay, but good hours. I used that Belgian machine for ten minutes. I was practically forced to. After that I couldn't type. I lost my job. Something happened to my mind. I became an artist."

"Oh," I said understandingly.

He paused in his glass strumming, a faraway expression coming into his blue-gray eyes.

"You know," he said slowly, "that Belgian machine is one of the most diabolical things there ever was. It may explain all of Lester's other—idiosyncracies. So simple. So diabolic." He flavored the word

Illustration by James B. Settles



Two of the ships dropped down toward Earth. Did it mean war?

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richly with meaning.

"What's so diabolic about a simple typewriter?" I asked.

Hannes' eyes turned blank as the Italian waiter brought the salad. When the waiter left, his eyes remained blank.

"What's so—" I began.

"And Lester uses it all the time," Hannes went on as though he hadn't heard me. "It makes him different. You can tell it just by looking at him. He *thinks* differently than normal people because of that Belgian secret weapon. His eyes focus differently. It's not being cockeyed or having your eyes turn outward. It's sort of a fourth dimension cockeyedness—if you get what I mean."

"Vaguely," I said, deciding a direct assault would be the only way to make Hannes come to the point. "But why? How could a simple thing like a typewriter do that?"

Hannes blinked at me, ran a finger half-heartedly around his drinking glass, then dipped his fork into his cottage cheese salad.

"Its keyboard isn't standard," he said.

I looked at him sharply, suspecting that he was pulling my leg; but if so he was a superb actor. And slowly the full sense of what it meant dawned on me. For a person who had used the standard keyboard to try to use one that wasn't standard would be a horrible experience. It would be like running a buzz saw across the intricate wiring behind a telephone switchboard.

A picture rose in my mind, of delicate white strands of nerve fiber becoming snarled and twisted, and snapping; of helpless eyes searching for an *a* or a *d* or an *m*. It was as vivid and surrealist as one of Hannes' paintings. I closed my eyes tightly and shook my brains.

* * *

I emerged from the subway into a world totally unlike that I had seen so far during my short stay in New York. Fresh vegetables jutted out from store fronts at regular intervals. Not far away a horse attached to a decrepit junk wagon stepped onto the sidewalk and snared an ear of corn from such a display, and tossed his head disdainfully at the short and exceedingly wide store keeper who rushed out to berate him for his thievery.

Four teen age boys with sallow dangerous faces lolled against the facade of a two hundred year old apartment house, hands in dark suit pockets, eyes surveying passers by with the same smouldering light of those of a caged panther.

I paused in front of a drug store whose windows were covered with signs in Yiddish, Russian, German, and English, with an almost

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unnoticeable "Se habla Espanol" at the bottom. The smile that rose to my lips over this was jarred loose by someone bumping me rudely. I glanced down to see an incredibly short and dirty woman of perhaps forty glaring at me.

"Get ahtta da way, ya bastard," she said, pushing into the drug store.

I took her advice and rounded the corner into the more deserted side street leading to West End Avenue. Three blocks, Lester had said on the phone.

The sidewalk stretching ahead of me was similar to the one I had just left in one respect. There were masses jutting out from the buildings nearly to the curb, only these masses were not fresh vegetables, but garbage cans.

I wove an erratic course along the sidewalk, avoiding garbage cans, children playing hop skip, children on bicycles and tricycles, and very short women carrying very large shopping bags.

Three enormous gas storage tanks lifted into the dirty sky. If I had my directions correct they would be less than fifty yards from Lester's television set. I wondered how he could get reception at all with them so near.

West End Avenue was very wide, and the cars were going forty miles an hour, with only their parking lights on—the custom in New York at night.

Across the street and up in the middle of the block would be the entrance to the walkup that was my destination. There were store fronts there, but aside from a shoe repair shop they seemed vacant or had dirty curtains covering them.

A gap in the stream of cars seemed imminent. I prepared to dart across the street. A fetid odor smote my nostrils. Looking in the gutter at my feet I saw the bloated form of a dead cat. Then I was running. A taxicab tried its best to run me down, then slowed to see if I might become a customer. The driver leaned out the window and spat when I didn't flag him down.

I came to the right number. There were two steps leading up to the entrance. A musty smell swept around me as I opened the doors and went into the feebly lit hall.

"Third floor," Lester had said. I looked at the cast iron stairs and wondered how old they were.

THREE flights up I found the door. There was an arrow in bright red paint terminating at a small pin. I pressed the pin and heard the unmistakable sound of an alarm clock. There were footsteps inside. The alarm was shut off. The door opened.

I looked at the eyes of the man who stood there, and thought of what Hannes had said about fourth dimension cockeyedness. Lester was short. Perhaps five feet five.

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"How do you like my doorbell?" he asked, smiling. "It's an old alarm clock. Makes a good doorbell. You wind it instead of buying new batteries all the time."

"A good idea," I said. I stepped past him into the short hall.

"The roller derby's on," he said. "It'll be over in another half hour. Then you can see my typewriters."

I preceded him into the kitchen and across into a six by ten darkened room in which a television screen was making pretty geometric patterns.

"Frequency's off a bit," Lester said. "D.C. here. Have to convert it." He touched a knob on a plywood cabinet the t.v. set rested on. The lines settled into a picture of several girls darting around a small track on roller skates."

"No shadows!" I exclaimed. "I thought there would be, after seeing those storage tanks across the street."

"This is what gets rid of them," Lester said, pointing to the hoop antenna on top of the t.v. set. He moved it slightly, and immediately there were three or four shadow pictures. He readjusted the hoop and they were gone.

Giving me his slow good-natured grin, Lester dropped into a chair a few feet from the t.v. screen. I looked around and took another. We watched the roller derby in silence for several minutes.

Suddenly bright flashes shot into the t.v. image. An instant later the picture degenerated into geometrical lines. Lester started to rise.

"Let me get it," I said quickly, darting in ahead of him.

He could not have prevented me except by physical force as I touched the frequency control knob and twisted it.

"Not so much," he said. "It only takes a little ——"

He stopped as an image cleared on the screen.

I breathed a sigh of relief. The frequency had been able to go up to ninety-three. I had hoped it would.

* * *

KEEPING my hand over the knob so that Lester couldn't touch it, I watched his expression. He stared at the screen, at the face and shoulders in the screen.

"Looks like you've got a science fiction program on," he said. "This is interesting—the way you got it." He squinted at the channel selector knob. "Yep. Still on eleven, and the roller derby's on that channel yet."

"What happened then?" I asked innocently.

He watched the face in the screen, thinking.

"Maybe," he said, "you've changed the frequency of the power input to a harmonic. That would explain it. Say ninety cycles. That might set up a harmonic fluctuation that would bring in the image, but from

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a different channel. I wonder which one . . . "

He picked the t.v. program list up off a pile of record albums and thumbed through it.

"Here's today's programs," he said. "Now . . . " His eyes found the right list. "That's funny," he said. "No science fiction program on any channel." He laid the program down. "Let me see what frequency you have on the power input," he said. "Take your hand away." And when I didn't, "Good God, Felix, I won't touch the damn thing. This is beginning to look too important to be careless about."

I took my hand away and stepped back better to see the screen. While Lester concentrated on estimating the line frequency I concentrated on the image in the screen.

"I may have been right at that," Lester said. "It's somewhere around ninety. Between ninety and ninety-five, I think. But then it couldn't be right. The image wouldn't synchronize. You know what I think?"

He straightened and looked at me.

"What?" I asked.

"Don't laugh," he warned. "I think this is a t.v. broadcast from out in space. Maybe from a space ship a few hundred thousand miles up."

"I'm not laughing," I said, smiling.

"See if you can hang onto the picture," he said. "I'm going to try to interest somebody in this."

HE went to the phone in the other room. I watched the t.v. screen briefly. The image began to repeat. Then it degenerated. I touched the line frequency knob and stabilized it.

"Some newspaper reporters are coming over," Lester said when he came back into the room. "One of them is a television expert. They'll all be here in less than half an hour."

"I discovered something while you were phoning," I said. "The screen sequence repeats itself every ten minutes. Must be a film broadcast."

"That makes me even more certain it's a message broadcast from some ship out in space," Lester said with as near an approach to excitement as he would ever get. "Too bad we don't have a movie camera so we could get the whole thing—in case it cuts off."

"It might be a good idea to locate one," I said. "You never can tell. And if this's from space it's probably the most important thing ever to happen."

"Funny how you got it," Lester said.

I grinned while I searched his expression for signs of suspicion.

"If I knew anything about television," I said, "I probably never would have gotten it. I turned the knob too far. It pays to be ignor-

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ant—in this case."

"Did you know about my variable line frequency before you came over?" Lester asked.

"Yeah," I said carelessly. "I had dinner with Hannes last night."

"Oh, then you know everything," Lester said. "Would you like to try my Belgian typewriter?"

I smiled and started to make some comment when the alarm clock doorbell started ringing.

"That must be the reporters," Lester said. He glanced at the t.v. screen. "It would be just like that thing to go off while I bring them in. Then they'd think it was a hoax."

Grinning, he left the room.

* * *

THE phone rang. I scraped my feet on the bath mat and went barefooted to answer it.

"Felix Phelps?" the voice at the other end asked. "This is Ed Nelson of the Herald. Could I come up a minute? I'd like to get a story on what happened last night from your angle."

"Come right up," I said.

I glanced around hastily, then began hiding papers in my brief case, leaving only the manuscript of my current translation beside my typewriter. Taking one last glance around to make sure all else was out of sight, I went back to the bathroom and finished drying myself. When the knock came at the door I had on only my trunks.

"Come in!" I called.

I heard the door open and close, and tossed the towel in a corner, then opened the door and went out into the room.

"Oh!" It was a feminine squeal. I stopped abruptly.

One part of her mind was examining me with obvious relish, the other part blushing and being embarrassed.

"You had a very male voice over the phone," I said.

She had turned her back to me.

"I've cultivated it," she said in her male voice. Switching back to her normal voice, "I knew if you knew I was a girl you'd tell me to wait in the lobby. I wanted a candid interview."

"Should I put on my trousers and make it more formal?" I asked.

"Please do!" she said.

A moment later, with my trousers on, I said, "All right."

She turned and regarded me frankly.

"I rather expected a small, oldish man," she said.

"I might be older than I look," I said. "Anyway, what did you want to know about last night."

"How did you happen to turn that knob to the right frequency last night?" she asked.

"Stupidity," I said, shrugging. "Actually, I shouldn't have touched the thing. I could have gummed things up." I picked up my pack of cigarettes. "Cigarette?" I asked.

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"Thanks," she said, taking one. I studied her while I lit her cigarette.

"You're quite beautiful," I said. "Who's your boy friend? Some harried reporter?"

"I don't have one," she lied.

SHE turned away and went over to the table and glanced at the top sheet of the typewritten manuscript.

"A story you're writing?" she asked.

"Yes," I said.

"Could I watch you write?" she asked.

"In the first place I haven't had my breakfast yet," I said. "In the second place, I can't write when anyone's in the room. Distracts me." I glanced at the briefcase. It was unlocked. I went over casually and snapped it shut.

"No breakfast yet?" she said.

"I was about to order it sent up," I said. "Would you like some?"

"Just some coffee," she said absently. "Thanks. This manuscript—it isn't a final draft is it? Some of the phrasing is rather unusual."

"No," I said, going to the phone. "I write that way sometimes, and then smooth it out before final draft."

"Lester told me you're a prolific writer," she said, looking up from the manuscript. "I'll have to read some of your stories."

"They aren't much," I said. "Just a means of earning a living." I lifted the phone. "Give me room service."

"Wait a minute," she said hastily. "Suppose you get dressed and we go out and eat."

"Never mind," I said into the phone.

"I know a place that has breakfasts out of this world," she said. "This is on me. I can charge it to expenses."

"Why not," I grinned.

Ten minutes later we stepped out of the elevator and started across the lobby.

"Just a minute, Felix," she said. "I'll have to phone the paper and tell them where I'll be."

An hour later when I returned to my room I looked across the room at the briefcase. It had definitely been moved.

I went over and opened it. If any of the papers in it had been touched they didn't show it. I looked at the pages of the unfinished manuscript beside the portable typewriter. They were piled more neatly than I had left them. I went to the phone.

"How long ago did I receive that call?" I asked, putting a mixture of perplexity and exasperation into my voice to imply anything the girl at the switchboard wanted it to imply.

"Just twelve minutes ago," she said. "The way I happened to

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know—"

"Thanks," I interrupted her. I nodded to myself as I hung up. Edwina Nelson had called in the lobby and had a photographer come up and take pictures of those papers and the translation. She had called my room and warned him when I left her after breakfast.

I started to turn away. The phone rang. "Maybe the operator insists on telling me how she knew how long ago," I thought, frowning. But it was Hannes.

"I just saw the headlines, Felix," he said. "You old so and so, you're always having all the luck. Imagine, being in on the greatest event of modern times, a message from out in space!"

"Pure accident," I murmured.

"Man!" Hannes enthused. "This'll make you. Lester too. I suppose you'll have scientists calling on you, and top brass from Washington coming to consult you."

"I hope not," I said. "Say, Hannes, I'm busy right now. Why don't you drop up later and have a drink with me?"

"Maybe I'll do that," he said. "I'd like to hear all the dope first hand. So long now."

The phone rang again. I hesitated and then answered.

"Hello!" I said.

"This is Edwina, Felix," Edwina said hastily. "I'd like to see you again right away. It's very important. I'm down in the lobby."

"All right, come on up," I said.

I hung up. The phone started to ring again. I ignored it and went to the briefcase. Taking out the papers I looked about the room. A sudden hunch possessed me. I went to the window and pulled aside the venetian blind and tossed them out. Instantly they were separating and each drifting downward. From the seventeenth floor level they would become widely distributed before reaching the street.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," I called cheerfully, taking out a cigarette. The door opened as I touched the flame of my lighter to the cigarette. Edwina came in. Three men followed her in, the last one closing the door and turning the bolt.

"AREN'T you presuming a little too much on your position to bring these men in with you without asking me?" I asked, smiling calmly as I snapped the lighter closed.

"Sorry, Felix," she said. "These are G men. They want those papers in your briefcase."

"What papers?" I asked.

One of the men walked boldly over to the briefcase.

"Wait a minute," I said, stepping in his way. "You don't touch that briefcase without a search warrant. Try it and I'll see how much training you have."

He blinked at me a moment.

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"All right," he said. "I'll go get a search warrant. Meanwhile my two companions will stay to see that you don't hide the contents."

"That's what you think," I said. "The whole lot of you can get out. You too, Edwina."

"That's the wrong attitude," Edwina said. "These men can act on the assumption that you are an enemy alien and seize that briefcase without a search warrant."

"Maybe you're right," I said, smiling in a way that implied I was about to give up. I turned to the briefcase and made two or three mysterious passes over it with one hand, then stepped away. "Go ahead and search," I said.

The G man blinked at me again. I could see the wheels in his mind trying to make sense out of what I had done. With his eyes still on me he picked up the briefcase and opened it, then looked at me again, this time unblinkingly.

* * *

I got up out of the overstuffed chair and advanced to welcome Lester. He shook hands, the slow grin that was his trademark making his features a grown-up version of those of a naughty six year old boy. He looked around the room.

"They keep you in style, at any rate," he said. "I thought I'd be looking at you through heavy wire mesh when they brought you out from the cell they kept you in."

I darted a look at the five G men standing about the room.

"This comfort isn't for me," I said. "They just want their men to be comfortable while they watch me."

"I thought you'd like to see the nice writeups they gave you," Lester said, taking the folded newspaper out of his sagging coat pocket and giving it to me.

I unfolded it. The headlines were: NOTED WRITER EXTRATERRESTIAL SPY? There was a picture of me. Another of part of a page of the papers that Edwina's co-worker had photographed.

"*Are* you an extraterrestial spy?" Lester asked, the slow grin still on his face. He might have been asking me if I were from Chicago.

"Believe it or not, Lester," I said, "I'm a Democrat."

"For a Democrat," Lester said, "you sure have the rest of the party pale and nervous. I might have believed you if you'd said you were a Republican. It's about time they tried something really desperate to embarrass the Democrats."

"How's the television stuff coming?" I asked casually.

"They're working like mad to convert the biggest station in New York to a line current of ninety-three and four tenths cycles per second," Lester said. "Also they're making more of my kind of receiver setup. They're going to take directions from Chicago, New York, and Philly, and try to find out how

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far out in space that broadcast is coming from."

"Then I suppose the next edition of the paper will give the results of that," I said.

"Probably," Lester said. "How did you make those papers disappear from your briefcase?"

"Very elementary, Watson," I grinned. "I took them out before Edwina and the G men came in, and flushed them down the toilet."

"Sure," Lester said. "The minute you get in your room Hannes gets you on the phone. The instant he hangs up Edwina calls you and comes up. That photographer had his ear glued to the door of your room. They thought about the toilet, and flushed it while he listened at the door. He could hear it even with the bathroom door closed, and he swears the toilet wasn't flushed before Edwina and the G men went in."

"Maybe I threw them out the window," I said.

"They thought of that too," Lester said. "There was a fair wind that might have carried the papers all over town. None have been found. Anyway, that means you would have rushed right into your room and tossed them out the window without hesitation. Why? The news photographer made sure everything was within a thousandth of an inch of the way he found it."

"Why do they want those papers?" I asked. "They have photos of them."

"The paper," Lester said. "They have an idea it might prove to be different than any known paper. That could prove what seems to be obvious—that they are extraterrestial in origin." He shook his head, sadly admonishing. "All this time I've thought you were a wonderful writer, and it turns out all you do is translate the works of other authors from some planet. The editors who have been giving you good money for *original* stories will probably sue."

"I'll pay them back from sale of reprint rights," I said.

I was watching Lester's eyes. Hannes had been right. There was a strange quality to them that was best described as fourth dimensional cockeyedness.

"You know so much, Les," I said. "Are they investigating me? Questioning my relatives, looking up my birth record and such?"

"I don't know," Lester said. "All I know is that they're afraid of you. They don't know whether you're friend or enemy. They're scared to death that you'll vanish when you darn well feel like it, just like those papers vanished."

"I could," I said, picturing myself jumping out the window. "But you may assure them that if I vanish it won't be in the same way the papers did."

"What do you think we'll get

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when we televise and broadcast with line frequency matching that of the image we're getting?" Lester asked.

"Probably an answer," I said.

"Probably," Lester admitted. "But what kind? A demand to surrender?"

I took out a cigarette and lit it, my eyes studying the G men and Lester. The G men were pretending disinterest in the conversation.

Taking a deep drag on the cigarette and exhaling smoke casually I said, "Who knows, Lester. Maybe it's only a courtesy call."

* * *

I awoke. I opened my eyes and saw a man sitting across the room by the window. Closing my eyes again I thought of Lester's visit the evening before. It brought a smile to my lips. I had a great admiration for Les.

Seemingly slight of build, only five feet five in height, with his air of being a naughty little kid grown to adulthood without becoming anything else, there was yet an aura of the cosmic about him. I could picture him standing before the onrush of stampeding elephants without turning a hair or losing his boyish grin, or behind the controls in a world wide pushbutton war punching keys that deployed millions of tons of fighting equipment in continual deathdealing maneuvers with the same disinterested interest that he used in operating his Belgian typewriter.

I thrust him into the back of my mind and relaxed, soothing my consciousness until it was an almost stagnant stream. Slowly I became aware that during the night there had been a change. The tempo of the world had altered.

The giant sprawling creature that is the United States was stirring to slow movement, while the other creatures known as nations were peeking over the horizon at Earth's fair haired boy in curiosity. In my mind's eye I could see the panorama of action as it would probably be. Warships slipping up past the Statue of Liberty with their latest type weapons trained upward, slipping up into the east and west channels to ring Manhattan. Radar nets converted to line frequency of ninety-three and four tenths. Newspapers working frantically to bring out special editions for each new development, each new thought of some authority.

I felt the slow stirring of the body cells of Uncle Sam as they worked in their factories, their fields, their carpet floored offices, or sped along their hard surfaced roadways, radios on to keep informed of the last minute developments.

In my thoughts I rose above myself and viewed my present position, isolated, ringed by the white corpuscles, one of which even now sat by the window, as they waited

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for the nerve centers of the brain of the creature to identify me as either benevolent or malignant.

Perhaps even this minute one or more of the ego-centers of the creature's mind was probing the various nerve impulses originating throughout the area of infection and forming tentative decisions. The President, the State Department, the Senate, Congress, as well as every individual person that was in essence a cell of the greater creature, the nation.

Opening my eyes, I sat up.

"Are you awake, sir?" the G man said, standing up. "I'll order your breakfast sent in."

"Okay," I said. I watched him go to the door and go out, leaving it ajar. His voice came faintly from the other room. There were other voices, polite, low pitched.

I plunged through a quick shower, amusing myself by trying to figure ways of vanishing, just to make the white corpuscles start scurrying around, afraid that the infection they had walled in had broken into the blood stream.

When I came out after the shower Hannes was in the room, his eyes bright with excitement, his movements fluttering with the same emotion.

"Hi, Hannes," I said goodnaturedly. I looked around the room with a wry grin and said, "You warned me about that Belgian typewriter. I should have heeded your warning."

"Tell me, Felix," he said. "Are you *really* an extra-terrestial?"

"Suppose I said no?" I said.

His face fell. "I was hoping you were. I wanted to paint you if you were." He brightened again. "But you must be. Everyone is convinced of it."

"I'm one up on the flying saucers then, huh?" I smiled.

"I'm serious, Felix," Hannes said. "I want to paint you. At least make a preliminary sketch. I can make the painting from that."

I looked at him, saw the light of inspiration deep in his eyes. I could see that it would be a mood painting holding an indefinable *alienness* that would be part of the overall picture rather than of some detail.

"All right, Hannes," I said. "I take it I won't have to pose?"

"No," Hannes said. "I'll catch a line here, a shadow there. Just go on with your day. I'll paddle after you like a pet poodle."

A waiter brought in my breakfast.

"Coffee?" I asked Hannes.

"No," he said. "Just forget about me. I'll be part of the wall paper."

* * *

TWO new faces appeared in the doorway. I glanced up, my coffee cup in my hand. They saw Hannes and went out without speaking. A few minutes later one of the familiar faces came in.

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During those few minutes a newspaper photo rose from the well of my memory. It was a photo containing one of the two strange faces.

The G man who had come in crossed to Hannes and started to say something.

"Just a minute," I said. He turned and looked at me. "If the President wants to see me he can see me while Hannes is here," I said.

A wry smile came to the G man's lips. "He might as well now," he said. "The object in trying to get your friend out was to keep this meeting secret."

"It'll be kept secret as long as necessary," I said.

"The President?" Hannes said brightly. "Boy! This's going to be good." He looked at me humorously. "Now you'd *better* be an extra-terrestial, Felix—or it won't be long until you become an ex-terrestial!"

I didn't reply. My eyes were fixed on the door. I was wondering if the President would remember me. Probably not. If he did he would reveal it, not being too poker faced.

The two new faces came into the room again. They crossed to Hannes.

"I hope you don't mind," one of them said, quickly running his hands over Hannes' clothing. He stepped back and nodded to the other, who went to the door, stuck his head out, and nodded.

The President paused in the doorway, his eyes going questioningly to Hannes, then jumping to me. I saw his eyebrows go up and come down. He recognized me. From the lines of puzzlement I knew he couldn't quite remember where he had seen me. Suddenly his face cleared. He remembered.

"It's quite a remarkable thing, isn't it?" I said.

"Even under the circumstances," he agreed. "I saw you only once. You were standing on the curb in a crowd as I passed by in a car during a political trip. Something made me look back at you after my car had passed you—and now, after four years I remember it, remember you, and remember the circumstances of my first seeing you." He studied me closely. "And yet," he said, "for the life of me I can't see anything about you to impress me like that."

I said nothing. I could have said nothing without going into a detailed and unbelievable discourse on bi-consciousness and the dual mind of man, mass-consciousness that knits a nation into a true entity on a higher order, and a host of the finer points of logic and science that the scientists of Earth have done little more than touch on yet.

"We've been in contact with the

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ships hovering outside the atmosphere," the President said abruptly. "We may have been overly cautious, but we went ahead on our own without asking your aid. In fact—" he took a deep breath, "—we didn't even mention that we were aware of your existence in the brief exchanges we've had so far."

"I imagine the exchanges were by sign language," I said. "What results did you have?"

"Instead of answering that question," the President said slowly, "I'd like to ask you a few—and get straight answers. I'll believe you, whatever you say—for various reasons. This will only be my personal belief, however. I don't guarantee that anyone else will believe you. And not being a dictator I can't guarantee that the nation will act on my beliefs."

"That's fair enough," I said. A grin forced itself to my face against my will. "What I'm going to tell you will be even harder to believe than you expect."

"No matter how incredulous I'll believe it," he said.

I glanced over at Hannes who seemed deaf to the conversation and thoroughly intent on sketching me. If I hadn't known him very well I would have been fooled. But he was all ears.

I turned back to the President, my smile growing broader.

"I'd like to make a bet with you," I said. "I'd like to bet you an autographed five dollar bill that you won't believe me."

"I'll take you up on that," he said quickly.

"Okay," I said.

* * *

"I was born in Detroit," I said, "My mother was half Irish and half English. My father was half Scotch and half English. I have never been outside the United States."

"What!" the President said. "You don't need to go any further. You've just won that five dollar bill."

I shrugged.

"How did you know the proper —line frequency isn't it?" he demanded.

"By equating electronic circuits of all types to an unknown frequency that would give maximum efficiency of materials in construction," I said. "It was an abstract problem at the time, but later on I deduced that any race not dependent on arbitrary standards would arrive at the same answer and actually use that frequency."

"It sounds plausible," the President said. "But there are too many other things. Those photographs of the papers from which you were copying a story, for example. And the way you made them vanish."

"My own brand of shorthand," I said. "And I simply tossed them out the window of my hotel room."

The President said nothing, mere-

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ly shaking his head slowly. I took out a cigarette and lit it.

His face brightened suddenly.

"How about my remembering you?" he demanded triumphantly.

"You're clutching at straws," I said.

"Yes," he admitted. "That was clutching at straws all right. But what you're telling me can't be true. How did you know those ships were out there broadcasting a television image?"

"I didn't," I said calmly.

A burst of laughter came from the corner where Hannes sat. The President's face was growing dark with anger.

"If this is all true," he said, "why didn't you say so at once? Why all the mystery?"

"I didn't get a chance," I said. "Nobody asked me or gave me an opportunity to talk."

"Do you know what flight principle those space ships use?" the President snapped.

"Yes," I said. "I figured it out for myself several years ago."

"Do you know where they're from?" he snapped.

"I could hazard a guess," I said. "I don't know."

"From Mars?" he said.

"No," I answered. "My guess would be that they're from interstellar space."

"What do they want here?" he snapped.

"I would guess that it's a courtesy call," I said. "Probably to invite the human race on Earth to join them in outer space."

"The more I talk to you the less likely that seems," the President said, making an effort to keep calm. "I would be more apt to believe you if you were frank with me."

"You're inclined to believe that they want to take over the Earth?" I asked.

"Frankly, after talking with you, yes," he said.

"It would be as likely as it would for a butterfly to have ambitions to rule the caterpillars," I snorted.

"That I'm inclined to believe," the President said more calmly. "But even there—you display an assurance that could come only from knowledge, not guesswork as you claim."

"Deduction," I corrected. "What could we offer people who live in outer space? Materials? Any material we could offer them or they could demand of us can be found *more plentifully drifting in space*, and taken without the wasting of power necessary to lift it free of Earth's gravitation. Manpower? They probably have a population in one district of interstellar space many times greater than that of the Earth, and there are probably millions of such districts. Science? Factories? Technology? Our most refined and perfected of present day things are most likely unbelievably crude to them."

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"How about Plutonium and allied radioactives?" he snapped.

"This is just a guess, mind you," I said, "but I think they'd have as much use for them as a restaurant would for arsenic."

"Then in all this—this maze—of what you've told me," the President said, "the thing you want to assure me of is that this proposed meeting just off the coast with a ship from this armada hovering out in space is just a courtesy call?"

"Just a courtesy call," I nodded.

* * *

"THE President didn't believe me, Hannes," I said ruefully.

"You're a very good liar, Felix," he grinned, "but you can't talk yourself out of the obvious."

Twenty-four hours later, enthroned behind canvas and easel, he repeated it. "You can't talk yourself out of the obvious, Felix. You know too much." His grin broadened. "And when you see my finished painting even you will have to admit you ain't human."

"What I look like when you get through with me," I said, "doesn't worry me half as much as what will happen to me after those extra-terrestials land." I glanced at my watch. "They're scheduled to land in the outer harbor almost any minute now."

I went to the window, ignoring the G man who stood there looking out. In the two days that I had been surrounded by this breed of white corpuscle I had come to identify it completely with its analogue. Silent, uncommunicative, they were part of the furnishings of a room, inactive so long as I remained passive. I had no reason to believe I was a prisoner in this swank apartment high in the air on Manhattan's lower east side. In fact, I felt sure that if I were to leave it I would merely be followed by a corps of the creatures, like a travelling infection in a pus pocket in the blood stream.

The sky above and to the east was cloudless and blue. The lights across the water in Brooklyn were already on, though it was still daylight.

There was no sign of the approaching ships. I turned away.

"How about giving me a look at the portrait, Hannes?" I said.

"Uh uh!" he said. "I never let anyone look at unfinished work. It never comes out right if they do."

I shrugged and turned on the radio, found a station with the news on, and turned it down to a whisper. The commentator, his voice vibrant with excitement, was announcing that the space ships were even now over the Atlantic, having passed above Gibraltar just five minutes ago, at an estimated speed of nearly two thousand miles an hour. Their altitude had been, roughly, eighty miles.

"Observers report their shape as

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being very similar to that of the flying saucers with one variation: they have rockets," the commentator said.

"Why do you suppose these have rockets while the flying saucers didn't?" Hannes asked.

"The flight principle of the flying saucers won't work in landing and takeoff from a large surface covered with atmosphere," I said.

"Oh!" Hannes said gleefully. "So you know!"

"Why not?" I grinned. "I figured it out for myself."

He snorted his disbelief, making several violent brush strokes on the hidden canvas.

THE commentator's tense voice proclaimed that a ship at sea had sighted the approaching craft, going at a speed of fifteen hundred miles an hour at an altitude of fifty miles, roughly, headed toward New York.

I sat down. The G man at the window was a motionless statue, waiting for his first glimpse of the ships. Hannes was a mad genius, lost in his concentration on fine brush strokes as his fingers sought to create a thing that would correspond to an image in his mind, an image that would probably resemble me only in vague outline, if even that.

I closed my eyes and soothed my conscious thoughts, reaching out to probe the mass mind, the entity known as the United States. A potentially immortal creature whose cells lived and died without ever fully realizing they were a part of an integrated being. How would that creature react? What would be the effect of the data that would shortly impinge on the mass consciousness? I thought I knew. I hoped I knew. But I couldn't be sure.

The President would be on one of the battleships. It was the sort of reckless courage that had brought him plenty of votes in the past. He would be the small town mayor at the railroad depot welcoming the visiting movie star and wishing to hell he had seen at least one picture the jerk had been in so he would have something intelligent to say. And if one of the visiting space ships so much as winked some nervous finger would touch off an atomic missile, and tomorrow Congress would appropriate fifty billions for development of space travel to meet the expected retaliatory invasion. Of such silly things were wars born, though common sense had grown in the world since 1914 when an archduke and a crackpot triggered the world.

The door opened.

* * *

"YOU are to come with us, sir," the Marine officer said respectfully. His eyes were devouring me with curiosity. Suddenly I became aware that I was really

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as much of an object of national interest right now as those approaching space ships.

I stood up, taking in the two silent Marines that flanked their officer, the overly large automatics protruding from their trim hips. I speculated in an amused fashion on what they would do if I ran for it.

"How about letting me take a look at what you've done?" I asked Hannes. "Maybe I won't be back."

"No," he said. "You'll have to come back if you want to see it. It'll be done in another hour."

Sudden anger flared in me. I turned away quickly to hide it, and went out the door without a backward glance.

The limousines waiting at the curb were as natty as the Marines themselves. The sidewalk was roped off, policemen holding back the crowd. Fifteen or twenty motorcycle police looking more machine-like than their steeds were in the street.

My eyes widened as I saw who was sitting in the limousine toward which I was being escorted. It was the President. He stood up in the car. When I climbed in he smiled and shook hands with me while television eyes on an improvised platform over the entrance to the building I had just left watched intently.

Motorcycle sirens screamed deafeningly. Ahead stretched a vacant street, sidewalks lined with people, policemen on horseback watching them warily.

The car picked up speed, riding into the shattering wave of sound that was the police sirens.

"How do you like it?" the President shouted at me.

"You owe me a five dollar bill," I shouted back.

He smiled, reaching into his pocket and bringing out a crisp new bill.

We turned into Wall Street. Long streamers of colored paper rained down from the faces of the man made cliffs that lined our path.

We emerged from the canyon. The motorcycle escort parted and stopped. Our car drove out onto a pier. I got out of the car and looked over the water. Here and there broad pillars of light climbed upward into the sky, searchlights seeking for the first glimpse of the space ships.

Even as I looked the first beam caught one of them. At once a dozen of them swung over to fix it and follow it in its lazy downward swoop. It seemed cigar shaped, a typical science fiction conception of a space ship with its large stern rockets, until it banked. Then its full proportions were revealed, a gigantic discus that could have perched over the financial district, resting on the spires of skyscrapers.

I looked out over the water at the Statue of Liberty, at the shadow forms of warships, their turret guns

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turned upward like telescope eyes of strange water creatures, watching uncomprehendingly the soaring flight of some seed pod.

A tired sigh was borne in on the calm breeze, and suddenly I knew it was the sound made by the huge ship as it cut the air in its flight.

Someone took my arm. I looked down. It was the President.

"Make you feel homesick?" he asked.

I smiled and walked beside him as we went down the steps to the waiting yacht.

Here there were no guns. Every man was trim as a theater usher and as precise as a machine. And already the navy yacht was in motion, the pier speeding astern at increasing pace.

I walked to the forward deck. Two miles away the first space ship was touching the water, sending up a spray that would have floundered a thirty-five thousand ton battlewagon.

Almost immediately the spray stopped. Even at a distance of two miles I could see the space ship dip and stop. It seemed to sink deeply into the water and rise slowly. Then I saw the advancing wall of water and realized that it had produced that effect.

A few minutes later the flattened wave reached the yacht, lifting it gracefully and dropping it in a pert obeisance so that its sharp prow kissed the water.

"Makes our battlewagons seem like rowboats," I heard the President's voice at my elbow.

I turned and smiled. "Yes," I said.

* * *

"SAY something in the language these people use," the President said. "I'd like to hear how it sounds."

"Se habla Espanol aqui," I said dryly. "You still don't believe me, do you."

"No," he said.

"You're in for a surprise then," I said.

"I don't think so," he said calmly. "We've been doing a lot of study of you in the past thirty-six hours. Your stories show semantically that they've been written by at least ten different people, at least two of them unquestionably alien to our planet. You've taken the identity of Felix Phelps rather well. Even friends of his of fifteen years ago swear you are Felix when they see your picture. Recognizable scars, size, everything. Whatever became of him that you could be so sure of not being discovered."

"It was fool proof," I said. "I *am* Felix Phelps."

"That *would* be foolproof," he said, smiling his unbelief.

I chuckled. "I was just thinking how difficult it would be to make you believe I'm an extra-terrestial if I had really wanted you to be-

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lieve it," I said.

He chuckled.

The space ship was growing nearer now. It rested in the water like some small island looming in the dark, with lights glittering here and there like cabins along a waterfront. Around the south point obscured light glowed more broadly, like a town, hinting at a pier and boats tied along it, with neon beer signs in front of the stores.

Searchlights on the bridge of the yacht sprang into being, sending out beams that brought back the metallic glitter of the shell of the space craft, revealing the underbelly sloping inward, licked by hungry waves that went in and in to meet the shell too far back to be seen.

The yacht changed course and ran parallel with the rim of the spaceship and a hundred yards out from it, heading around to the source of illumination. Finally it came into view, a broad section of the hull that had dropped to form an almost flat concourse, at least fifty yards square. On this flat expanse figures could be seen moving about.

The President touched my arm. I looked around. A sailor was holding out a pair of binoculars to me.

"Thanks," I said, taking them.

I placed them to my eyes, my fingers shaking slightly. At once my vantage point seemed to change to a spot on the concourse itself. I could see the figures close enough to make out their details.

I focused the image more finely, concentrating on faces. They were men. Men who could have walked down any street without being noticed if dressed in ordinary clothes. Men whose features were finely formed and intellectual.

I searched one face after another, my fingers gripping the binoculars until they were cramped.

I swayed suddenly and lowered the glasses to get my balance. The yacht was slowing to a stop with reversed speed. Ten yards away a heavy framework had been suspended, with thick rope bumpers to fend off the yacht when it came close.

My fingers were trembling so that I was in danger of dropping the binoculars. I looked at them impersonally, wondering what subconscious emotional stress was causing it.

I had been searching one face after another as though I were looking for a familiar face. The faces I had seen *were* familiar, but not as the face of one I had met before. Yet—I had seemed to expect to see someone I knew.

That was impossible. I *had* been born in Detroit. My parents *were* Scotch Irish and English. My stories had all been written only by me. Everything I knew about all this was just things I had figured

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out for myself. Things that had enough probability to attain reasonable certainty.

Very seamanlike figures along the edge of the giant platform were tossing coils of rope that unwound as they fell to the deck of the yacht. Regulation U.S. seamen were hastily tying them to large hawsers which were as quickly pulled up and looped around stanchions to moor the yacht in place.

A metal stairway was lowered so that its wheel base rode on the deck of the yacht.

"This is it," the President said, his voice tight with emotion. "Since you know these people—you go up first, Felix."

I didn't answer. There was no use in making further denials. I hadn't been believed. I wouldn't be believed now. We would go up. I wouldn't be able to speak the language of these visitors from space. They wouldn't know me. Eventually things would straighten themselves out.

I went up the metal steps. I reached the top and stepped onto the concourse of the space ship itself—a metal deck made by a science that had never before had any contact with that of the Earth, by men who had been born far out in space.

A hand that belonged to an extra-terrestial politely took my elbow and assisted me. I turned and waited until the President joined me. Around me stood men as tall as I, men who might have been born in New York or Chicago. Men with finely intellectual faces, cultured expressions.

On the far side of the concourse a small group stood in an attitude of waiting. Side by side the President and I started walking toward this group.

* * *

MY hands were trembling so violently now that I put them in my pockets and clenched them into fists. Yet my mind was calm, undisturbed by whatever emotion controlled my fingers.

Those distant figures were also advancing, to meet us half way. My eyes of their own volition went to one face after another, trying to *recognize a familiar face!*

One of the extra-terrestials came forward toward me, smiling familiarly. He placed his hands on my shoulders. A string of gibberish came from his lips. Alien sounds that I had never heard before, yet which sunk into my mind like hot coals, searing deep into my subconscious.

And suddenly they made sense. I stood, not breathing, while a thing happened that defies description. In my mind were two persons, one of which had always been aware of the other, remaining hidden, the other of which was me, though not the real me. It was Felix Phelps, while I—

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"Tell them that as President of the United States I extend them a welcome and offer them the hospitality of our country," the President was saying.

Automatically my lips were uttering words in the so strange and yet so familiar tongue, relaying the President's message to my fellow Cosmons, while the last barriers of the hypnotically induced bloc that had just been wiped away fell, and consciously, as Felix Phelps, I realized my true status as a fifth columnist who, as one of many during the past hundred years, had implanted the living seed of science and technology in the womb of Man on Earth, and nurtured it to full adolescence.

Arha Sunh spoke, and I turned to the President to translate.

"Arha Sunh, as representative of the Cosmons," I said, "accepts your hospitality, and in turn wishes me to extend to you and your people the invitation to join in the Cosmic family of all peoples."

The President's eyes were twinkling in admiration, and I knew that the twinkle was caused by his belief that back in that apartment where we had our first talk I had lied. I opened my mouth to explain to him the truth, that a hypnotically induce bloc had kept me consciously in ignorance of my true identity. Then I sighed in defeat. He would never believe now. I grinned.

"At least," I said, "I was telling the truth when I said this was just a courtesy call."

I glanced over the President's shoulder at the dark bulk of the shore, the edge of a vast, sprawling continent on the planet Earth, and in my mind's eye rose a vision of the others such as I, walking among men, not knowing consciously that they are more than men of the Earth, writing books, teaching, carrying on their job of raising mankind to his true place in the Cosmos as one member of the family of mankind.

"I believed *that*," the President said.

"Huh?" I said, my thoughts jerking back to my immediate surroundings. "Oh." And the final barriers slipped away in my mind.

I was Felix Phelps, man of Earth. But I was also Luo Tzenh, the Cosmon. Citizen of the Universe. Fifth columnist. Missionary.

THE END

COMING IN THE MARCH ISSUE:

David H. Keller—THE PLOT MACHINE
Eric Frank Russell—TEST PIECE
Charles R. Tanner—ANGUS MacAULIFFE AND THE GOWDEN TOOCH
Also in this issue: Poul Anderson, Lou Tabakow, Wm. C. Bailey

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PERSONALS

For sale: WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE, AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE, THE BIG EYE, LOOKING BACKWARD, TRIPLANETARY, GREAT MISCHIEF, THE COSMIC GEOIDS; minor defacements, no dust jackets. Don Willson, N.R.S.S., North Wilmington, Mass . . . *Ken Beale, 115 E. Mosholu Pkwy, Bronx 67, NY has back issues of Argosy (middle '20s to '41) for sale* . . . Al Mazzarelli, Jr. would like to receive letters from stf fans interested in discussing stf books and mags. Address 294 Fullerton Ave., Newburgh, NY . . . *Glenn R. Stephens, or anyone knowing his address, please contact the Rhodomagnetic Digest, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley 4, Calif.* . . . J. T. Oliver, 712-32nd Street, Columbus, Ga. will trade prozines and pocketbooks for fanzine subscriptions . . . *Frank Novak has for sale a complete set of Avon Fantasy Reader, $3; complete FATE Magazine, $3; 10 lb. collection of psychic & occult books, $5; "Collectors" Forteana, includes 1 vol. "Books of Charles Fort," and all issues of "Doubt" to date except No. 4, 5 & 7 in top condition, $10. Address P.O. Box 388, Benld, Ill* . . . A. Charles Catania, 620 W 182 St, NY 33, NY wants to trade G. O. Smith's NOMAD for any Shasta author anthology such as MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON . . . *Mrs. Betty Faulkner, 121 E 53 St, Long Beach, Calif. will sell or trade a collection of AS & FA and about 20 miscellaneous stf mags* . . . Don Ford, Box 116, Sharonville is the American agent for the British mag NEW WORLDS, send your subscriptions to him . . . *Columbus, Ga. fans interested in forming a club contact J. T. Oliver, 712 32nd St or Paul Cox, 3401 6th Ave.* . . . Bob Chambers, 990 N. Tenth, Coos Bay, Oreg. has copies of the Dec. '38 Golden Fleece available . . . *Southern fans who would like to join an all-Southern fanclub write Harry Moore, 2703 Camp St, New Orleans, La. Harry also has a list of 2000 fans in The Confederacy plus Ky, Okla and N Mex. He'll be glad to furnish you with a list of fans in your vicinity* . . . Wirespondence is taking the place of letters with fans who have wire recorders. Send a half-hour spool to Fred Goetz, 3488 22nd St, San Francisco and you'll get a prompt reply . . . *Anita Smith, 3258 W 141 St, Cleveland 11, Ohio would like to hear from anyone in the Cleveland area interested in discussing dianetics* . . . Wanted: complete issues of AS & FA containing Black Priestess of Varda, Gods of Venus, Titan's Daughter, I Remember Lemuria, The Lamp of Vengeance, Prometheus II, Outlaws of Corpus, and Star Kings; SS & TWS—The Blue Flamingo, The Time Axis, One of Three, The Black Galazy, Land of the Earthquake, The Ultimate Planet, Weapon Shops of Isher, the Sleeper is a Rebel or Bradbury's stories before '48. John Davis, 931 East Navajo Rd, Tucson, Ariz . . . *Louis I. Schreiber, PO Box 150, Elizabeth, NJ would like the name of an overseas stf fan to whom he can send magazines* . . . Large collection of fantasy books and mags, Horror Stories and Terror Tales for sale. Claude Held, 372 Dodge St, Buffalo 8, NY . . . *Alfred Goldenberg, 431 S. Palm Canyon, Palm Springs, California would like to correspond with someone interested in rockets and space projectiles* . . . Thomas Frankenfield, Camp Cooke, Lompoc, Calif. would like to hear from foreign penpals, and wants to know if there are any fan clubs located around Camp Cooke . .

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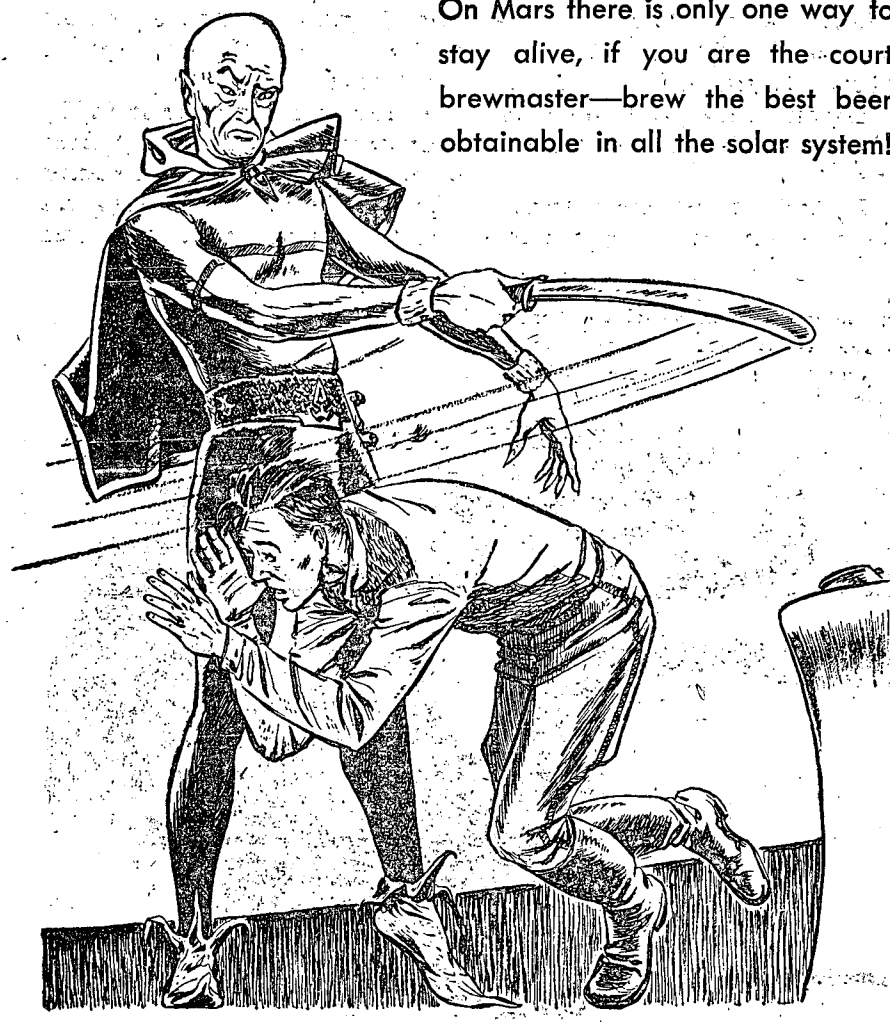
SKELETON KEY

By

William C. Bailey

On Mars there is only one way to stay alive, if you are the court brewmaster—brew the best beer obtainable in all the solar system!



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TATOM stared morbidly at his plate. What had that damned Monitor said about Muriel, he asked himself for the thousandth time. He turned his lean young face, eyes haggard and red rimmed, to the impassive Baldy who stood by him.

"Take it away," Tatom said, his voice choked with rage and defeat.

"Eat!" the tall Monitor told him, his hairless yellow scalp glistening as he shook his head toward the platter.

"Not until you tell me what you have done with my wife," Tatom snapped, his voice coming alive. The sharp slash of the Baldy's quirt cut his wrist cruelly. Tatom threw his lanky frame across the table at the inscrutable mutant. "What have you done with her?" he screamed, clawing for the yellow throat. His tortured senses exploded in a wild sear of light as the inhumanly quick mutant struck a vital point with his edged hand.

Awareness pounded painfully back into his mind. Every throb of his racing heart struck his senses more poignantly. He opened his eyes and pushed his hair back from

The Emperor drew his sword and chopped savagely at my head. I went down on my knees with all the speed I could muster.

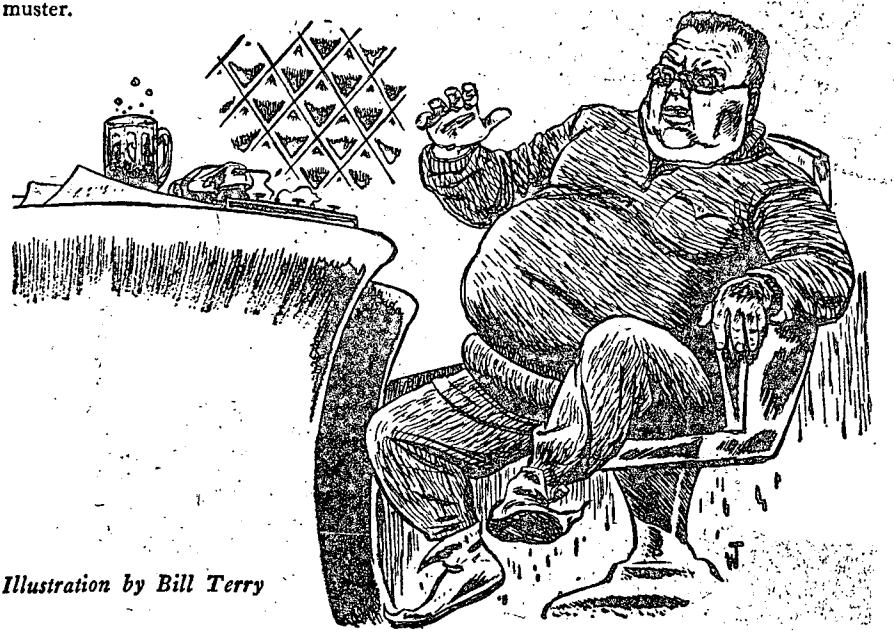

Illustration by Bill Terry

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his forehead.

For an instant he did not react to what he saw. His eyes stupidly took in the scene, a bare, simple office, with a slanted row of quartz windows overlooking the precise uniformity of a tightly planned city. A fat, mustached man in yellow-bordered Baldy garments sat before a modernistic desk, regarding him stolidly over a beer stein which he held in his hairy paw. Bristling iron gray hair sprouted from a square head, and icy blue eyes pondered him broodingly from behind steel-rimmed spectacles.

The catalogue of things seen repeated itself in Tatom's still numbed senses. A fat, *mustached man!*

"Oh," Tatom moaned. "A human!" He struggled to raise from his seat, but a shrieking pain in his head crushed him back in the chair.

The fat man belched. "Excuse me," he said in a rasping, twangy voice. "What's your name?"

"Clyde Tatom. I ! . . ."

"That's better," the other rasped, setting the stein down on the littered top of his littered desk. "You're coming along fine. Do you know where you are?"

Tatom lifted aching eyes despairingly to the red hue of the fast fading light coming through the slanted panes of quartz. "Mars, I suppose," he replied. "Why am I here?" he demanded weakly, tottering erect.

"The Emperor's orders," the paunchy man said testily. "Sit down before you fall down."

The Emperor's orders! He knew what those dread words meant. Clyde fell back dispiritedly to his chair and sank his face in his hands. "Impressed!" he sobbed. "Those inhuman, yellow zombies!"

A sharp laugh in a tone vibrantly different from the fat man's rasp made him flinch and look around. A tall, cruel-visaged Baldy was sitting at ease just behind his ordinary line of vision, holding a half empty stein of beer in his hand. He raised it slowly to his proud, chiseled lips and drained it. His yellow-black eyes narrowed with pleasure. A negligent left hand fingered the braided metal quirt that hung yellow and golden against the plain black of his slit tunic.

Tatom blinked and looked again. The Baldy wore neither the yellow border of the Administrators, nor the scarlet of the Nobility. Even more strange was ris drinking, as the Baldies were uncompromising ascetics.

He turned back to the fat, mustached man who still peered unblinkingly through thick lenses. "*You* are human?" he demanded, regarding the bordered tunic and high Mongolian collar the fat one wore tight about his red neck.

"Yas," twanged the other. "I'm August Strauss, the Imperial Brewmeister."

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"Brewmeister?" Tatom echoed with disbelief, pushing his hair from his eyes.

"Yas. Pull yourself together. Listen. You are in my office on top of the Imperial Brewery in Changkow. You were brought here at the order of his Imperial Majesty, Ming T'sui, because we needed a top-flight plant geneticist. Here take *this*," he said handing Tatom several sheets of paper. "We've heard of your work at Ames on gene bombardment. You're getting a priceless chance to put your discoveries to use. When you've gotten what we are after, you can go home. That monograph spells out the job for you. Get to your rooms and get some sleep. Look it over in the morning."

The tall geneticist shook his head. For the first time he smelled the yeastiness of the air. "Never!" he ground out. "I'll . . . "

"The hell you will," Strauss stopped him testily. "I've had enough from you. You're still silly from that slap on the neck. Here, follow Fong San; she'll show you your quarters."

A Baldy female, the first Tatom had ever seen, appeared from behind him like magic. The younger man looked with sickening distaste at her hairless, slant-eyed, hideousness. How monstrously her ears stuck out from that gleaming yellow skull, he thought. The quick preemptory motion of her leathern quirt was not to be mistaken. Clyde rose shakily and turned to the door. His last glimpse of the other showed Strauss calmly lighting a large curved-stem pipe. A cruel glitter flashed in the silent, mysteriously garbed Baldy's eyes.

He heard the whine of the elevator as he walked the few steps down the fragrant, malty corridor from the Brewmeister's office to his quarters which had the Spartan severity of all Baldy architecture. In his weakened state, he was glad to yield his spinning thoughts to sleep.

THE keening morning gale wakened Tatom before the dull red light of a distant sun had brightened to the coppery hue of full daylight. Sleep had ordered his thoughts. He rose and went directly to the desk where he had thrown the papers given him by Strauss. Half in curiosity, half in dread, he read the terms of his imprisonment. Strauss had not lied. It was a job in Tatom's field of artificial mutation, but a hard one. The Brewmeister wanted a mutation of six-row barley produced in the laboratory, which would yield a thousand-fold increase in the output of one of its naturally occurring enzymes. The monograph described zyphase, the catalytic enzyme in question, and listed the highly specialized laboratory equipment already assembled for the job. Much of it,

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Tatom recognized, was a development of the gene bombardment apparatus he had built and perfected at the University. Tatom was familiar with the ruthless abruptness used by the Baldies in getting their subsurvient human subjects to do their bidding. He braced himself for the two-year separation from his wife the monograph estimated would be required for the work.

A razor, blades and a change of clothes were laid out for him. Tatom shrugged, jumped into his shower and shortly made his way newly refreshed to the Brewmeister's office for a long session of instructions, punctuated with frequent pauses for cold, foaming steins of beer for them both.

He could not complain, he thought as he returned to his quarters at the end of the day, about the facilities Strauss had given him. He heard the elevator again, and remembered that the fat brewer had said they were on the top of the brewery. Tatom wondered whether he would ever ride the elevator down to freedom.

His laboratory was staffed with inhumanly capable Baldy technicians. Strauss had given him the key to his own vast library of brewing lore, and turned over to him a painstakingly kept record of every wort he had brewed on the Red Planet. Perversely enough, he had said nothing of why he cared about the zyphase content of the malt used in the brewery, other than to snap shortly that the beer would be better.

Tatom's life quickly settled itself into a routine of kernel treatment, germination, forced growth, harvest and analysis. Months fled by while the lanky geneticist kept to himself his hatred of his captors, his contempt of the Janissary Strauss and his concern for his bereft wife.

THE fateful day dawned as red and grim as the rest. The morning gale screamed thin, dying notes as the dust-laden gusts calmed with the rising sun. Tatom gave his hair a couple of last, unsuccessful strokes with the brush. He squared his shoulders before leaving his rooms, bracing his mind for another day of suppressed hatred. Opening the door, he walked with a composed dignity he did not feel across the corridor to his laboratory. The rich, malty smell of the brewery swirled cloyingly about his slender shoulders. It gave way to the familiar laboratory odors of ammonia and hydrochloric acid as he stepped into his day-time prison.

The geneticist maintained his stiff erectness as he walked down the aisle between the laboratory benches where Baldy technicians were already at work. The impassive mutants gave no sign of recognition. Their yellow, egg-bald heads bent glisteningly over microscope and retorts, weirdly lighted

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by the flicker of Bunsen burners in the draft of the exhaust fans. Tatom shut himself in his private office with a wave of relief, cutting himself off from the sight of the distastefully bald mutant women at the benches.

He began the day in the same discouraging pattern that had been the treadmill of his existence for many months. A sheaf of the previous day's analyses, Baldy-perfect in their preparation, were in his in-basket. He dragged them out and flopped them wearily before him. Mentally he slapped his face, the sharp mental impact bringing his beaten, cowering spirit into a new enforced awareness for the day. The reports seemed to hold the familiar negative findings. All but one, that is.

His unexpectant eyes almost missed it. He brushed his hair back and focused on the one result that really mattered. He read it again, and still again. His belly seized his spine in a grip of steel and twisted it in an agony of hope. The sharpness of his voice as he called for Fong San on the PBX made him realize his own tension. She strode into his office with the same grim somberness characteristic of all the race after man. Tatom forced himself to keep the grimace of distaste from his face as he looked at the mutant. "Analysis 2131," Tatom asked with an edge of reprimand in his voice. "Is this finding on zyphase content correct? It seems to be wrong by a factor of a thousand." He handed the sheet to the Baldy. Her yellow-black eyes barely flickered as mutant-quick perceptions took in the whole sheet with a single glance. Clyde felt a momentary twinge of envy at such mental powers. For a moment he felt the old regret that the protoplasms of the two races were too different to permit viable offspring of mixed matings.

"It is correct," she said. "The technician ran the test three times at my order."

"Good," Tatom said, glad to get rid of her so quickly. The weakness in his knees did not begin to assert itself until he was half way to Strauss' office. The ever-busy elevator sighed in its shaft. He felt his eyes mist over with the stabbing thought of his wife. Soon, darling, he promised himself . . . soon I'll be riding it down to you. He paused at the door of the Brewmeister's office to quell his scorn and hatred of the man whom, he knew, had pointed a dread finger at him, to have him impressed into Baldy servitude for his own purposes. Remember, Tatom told himself, you want to go home.

STRAUSS was hunched before his report-littered desk, as usual. "Yas," he rumbled with a grumpiness Tatom was all too used to. "What is it?"

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Tatom waved the analysis report. "My ticket home," he grinned, forcing a friendly note into his voice. He could see the Brewmeister tense in his squeaky swivel chair.

"What do you mean?" his rasping voice demanded.

"We've got it," Tatom told him happily. "The zyphase content of alteration 2131 is about twelve hundred times normal, and not another characteristic of the barley was changed." He laid the report on top of the jumbled heap of papers always piled on Strauss' desk.

The Brewmeister took it in his fat, hairy fingers, and rang for beer before reading the laboratory results.

"Fong San had the tests run three times," Tatom volunteered, as one of the Baldy women came in with two foaming steins on a tray. Strauss gulped half of the tankard in three noisy swallows, and set the sweating stein on his desk. He read the report several times before laying it down.

The fat Brewmeister belched. "Excuse me," he rasped. "All right, Clyde, this is it. Now, can you duplicate this alteration in the barley easily?"

Tatom rose from his seat and walked to Strauss' elbow. "Sure, August," he replied, trying to keep the atmosphere as intimate and personal as possible. "This report clearly points out the ninth nodule of chromosome number three as the one that controls zyphase output in the barley. One hundred grains were subjected to the same bombardment of that nodule and more than 90 responded the same way."

"Hmmm," Strauss rumbled thoughtfully, pumping back and forth in his squeaking chair. He belched noisily. "Excuse me," he said again, reaching for his beer. "How long will it take to treat enough seed grain to plant a hectare?"

Tatom grinned. "A couple of weeks to set up for mass production," he estimated, "And then maybe a week to treat the grain. Plant it in three weeks." And leave for home, he told himself.

"Do it!" the paunchy man said, banging his hairy fist down on the pile of paper on his desk.

"Fine," Tatom replied, "but before we get started on that, I'd like to get straightened out on when I can leave."

"We'll talk about that later," Strauss snapped. "Right now you've got work to do. You've fooled around for months with this, and Ming T'sui is in a hell of a sweat to have me brew a wort from this new barley."

"Now see here," the geneticist protested, pushing his hair out if his eyes. "You told me when you had these yellow zombies drag me here that it would take a couple of years to isolate the genetic factor responsible for zyphase output

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in barley! Now you're . . . "

"That was then!" Strauss interrupted harshly. "This is now. If you ever want to see Earth again, you'll get back to that laboratory and get to work!"

TATOM knew better than to argue. The bitter sting of Baldy quirts was ever present in his mind. He got up numbly and started back for his office. His fury mounted as he drew farther away from Strauss' door. Spinning on his heel, he strode back to the fat Brewmeister's office.

Strauss glared at him in angry surprise. "I just told you . . . " he began.

"You told me nothing!" Tatom seethed. "Damn it, the least you can do is to tell me what this is all about! I've slaved in that laboratory every waking hour since I've been on this cursed planet. Why is this so damned important? I've done the research for you. Why can't I go home?"

Strauss looked at him for a long, calculating minute. "You must forgive me, Clyde," he said in a more friendly tone, ringing for more beer. "I'm too long away from human kind. I forget that on Earth a job well done calls for praise. I was behaving like a Baldy."

"That's beside the point," Tatom insisted. "Have you been lying to me about going home?"

Strauss shook his head and smiled a little sadly beneath his luxuriant mustache. "No, Clyde, not lying," he said. "You shall go back."

He pumped himself around in his swivel chair with fat, stubby legs and looked out over the ordered ranks of the city.

Tatom's eyes followed his glance to where the morning sun brought coppery, heatless warmth to the windowless walls. Strauss said nothing until the beer had arrived and he had gulped, belched and excused himself.

He spoke slowly, his back still to the geneticist. "Don't think harshly of me, Clyde," he said. "The Emperor takes his hobby most serfously."

"His hobby?"

"Yas," Strauss rumbled, belching softly. "Excuse me," he said absently. "I know that on Earth, Baldies have no weaknesses. But here on Mars, away from any human eyes but tamed and beaten ones like mine, they pursue their vices. Politics, gambling, concubines and duelling, in that order, are the respectable occupations of any Baldy Noble. Ever since Ming T'sui's grandfather declared that beer was not an intoxicant, drinking it has been a good companion to the other vices. Ming T'sui can afford to extend his interest in beer to the very brewing of it. I'm just a tame sort of domestic, nothing more than the master of hounds, the trainer of his horses. Like you, I was too

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well recognized on Earth. Ming brought me here over twenty years ago because I was considered the finest brewer on earth.

"We spend a lot of time together. It's not a completely slave existence. Sometimes I almost think we are cronies. That was he whom you saw here the day we met, in the black tunic of his incognito. All this fuss over a new kind of barley is due to our joint plans to brew the finest lager ever made. Enzyme catalysts do most of the work in brewing, and this particular one, zyphase, enables a reaction to take place between certain acids in the wort and calcium pylosterate in our brew water. It will give us more soluble calcium and a brighter brew."

He turned back to Clyde. "So you see, young man, your cruel seizure and confinement are just an incident in the Emperor's hobby. But your work is nearly done, and when it is, you can leave."

TATOM'S eyes narrowed with hate. "You fat, lying swine," he gritted between his teeth, brushing back his unruly hair. "You know I've had access to your technical library, and I have read all of your brewing logs, going back for twenty years. I know as well as you do that you make your own brew water, since all water on Mars is manufactured anyway. It was *you* who called for traces of calcium pylosterate in your brew water, not two years ago! That's not all! I can't find a description of where the salt occurs in nature anyway! There are a hundred calcium salts that *would* react without an enzyme catalyst such as zyphase being necessary in the brew. You aren't telling me the truth."

In spite of the vigor of his words, Tatom was startled at the effect they had on the brewer. He blanched and almost cowered in his swivel chair. His puffy lips made meaningless sounds as he sputtered futiley.

"Now, now, Clyde," he gasped. "See here, what you don't know about brewing would fill my library. Whatever gave you such an idea? Of course I had calcium pylosterate added to the brew water." His initial shock and surprise began to dwindle. His rasping voice became firmer. "Look here," he said with more of his usual heavy-handlesdness. "I'm not going to spend all day teaching you the secrets of a lifetime of brewing. Calcium pylosterate is in the brew water for the best reason in the world. Don't you know that every such catalyst works on one and *only* one reaction? It's a lock-and-key relationship. Calcium pylosterate is the *only* substrate for zyphase. It would work on no other calcium salt. You stick to your end of the job and be awfully damned quick about it!"

Tatom rose to his feet. "I'll do

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my part," he said with measured venom. "I take it I can figure on being stuck here for two full years. God help you if you don't do your part in getting me back to Earth at the end of them!"

CLYDE marveled at the extent to which the Emperor made facilities available for the growth of the new 2131 barley. Several of the Imperial greenhouses were cleared out for growth of the first planting. The new plant looked like any other normal barley stalk. The technicians had changed the one characteristic of zyphase production without the slightest variation in all the others. The name "2131 barley" was soon a household word in the Palace and brewery.

Ming T'sui himself, dressed in borderless black silk, came to the harvest of the first hectare of the new plant. Tatom and Strauss, an oddly assorted pair, were standing together, watching the individual heads being cut meticulously by hand from each stalk and placed in tight sacks with infinite care, so as to not dislodge a single grain. After a day or so it would be thrashed, winnowed and cleaned for planting. The Emperor appeared without the fanfare that Clyde knew was associated with his State comings and goings. Tradition allowed him the informal dress and incognito when engaged with his gambling, his concubines outside the Palace, or his other hobbies. Nevertheless, the mutant laboratory technicians bowed deeply when the tall, bald figure stepped through the greenhouse door.

Coached long before for this second meeting, Clyde remained at ease, nor did the Brewmeister bow.

"Good morning, August," Clyde heard Ming T'sui say evenly.

"Yas," Strauss agreed in the same flat twang he used for all occasions. "A good morning, T'sui," he said, addressing him familiarly by his given name. "We have one hectare here, heavy with seed. We should gather at least three thousand kilos, perhaps more. Next crop it will be sixty hectares!"

The Emperor's high cranium wrinkled with thought, his supremely intelligent features turning slowly back and forth as he regarded the scene. "You will brew a small wort from this crop?" he asked.

Clyde saw Strauss square his shoulders. "Hadn't meant to," he said. "Hate to waste any seed grain, T'sui. In a couple more quick growth cycles in the forced-growth sheds, we may have some to spare."

Ming T'Sui shook his head in that quick, terse jerk characteristic of his race. "About seed I do not care," he said. "Make me a small brew from half of this."

"Not this crop!" Strauss snapped flatly.

The Emperor's slant-eyed face suffused yellowly. "Mind you . . . "

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he began, reaching for his golden quirt, but relaxed. A thin, resigned smile flickered briefly on his cruel, capable features.

"My good friend, August," he said softly. "I forget how many hours you have caused me to spend pleasantly with your great skill at brewing. I shall resign myself to your imperious wants, my fat, hairy little tyrant! But the third crop, my little August! The third crop!"

"Maybe," Strauss grunted, not smiling. "I'll see how I feel about it then."

Ming T'sui laughed. It was the first time Clyde had ever heard a Baldy express humor. His voice was deep and hearty, his rich vibrant laugh just short of a bellow. "You do not frighten easily, my friend," he chuckled, when his laughter had quieted. "No doubt that is the reason I have suffered you to keep your head this long!" He turned sharply on his heel and left. Clyde felt sweat running down his face, and knew it was not from the humid warmth of the greenhouse.

He looked across at Strauss. The squat Brewmeister was deathly pale. "Some day," Strauss said unhappily. "Some day my confidence won't be up to it, or he will be angry because his woman of the night before displeased him, and he'll cut my head off . . . *personally*." He started back to his office.

THE copper-skied days seemed to pass more quickly than ever as they waited for the succeeding crops to mature in the forced-growth sheds beyond the city. Seeding the entire yield of the second crop all but outstripped the available space in them, which Clyde now realized Ming had foreseen. He and Strauss were examining the harvest records late on the night following completion of the reaping, thrashing and weighing. Their constant yield of sixty-fold had borne enough from the thirty-six hundred hectares of the third crop to plant two hundred sixteen thousand hectares, a sizable part of the annual Terrestrial barley crop.

Strauss was nodding happily over his final beer of the day while looking at the figures that Tatom had gathered for him when the whine of the elevator sounded above the wail of the wind outside. They exchanged surprised glances, for it was far past Fong San's time in the deserted brewery. The door to the office opened and Ming T'sui stepped lithely through it. He must have slipped away from some State function, Clyde thought, remembering Strauss' injunction not to rise, for the Emperor was clad in gleaming silk as thin as a sigh, edged with the royal scarlet. His short, curved ceremonial sword was at his left side.

"Well, hello, T'sui," the paunchy Brewmeister said with some heart-

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iness. "You'll catch hell from your Chamberlain for sneaking over here tonight!"

The Emperor smiled coldly. He removed the skull cap covering his yellow baldness and advanced gracefully toward them. "Tonight, my little August," he said, fingering his golden quirt. "I am Ming T'sui, your Emperor. I am here to demand my right!" His smile left a lingering doubt in Tatom's mind as to his complete seriousness.

Strauss got to his feet, the chair squeaking mightily. He bowed as far from the waist as his paunch would allow, and stayed in the pose of obeisance. Clyde made no effort to move from his seat, and was rewarded by one flashing glance from the slanted Imperial eyes.

"Rise!" snapped Ming T'sui. "Now sit down, you fat old fool. Some night you will mock once too often. Now, as you humans say, my pound of flesh!"

"Yas," Strauss rasped, squeakily resuming his place at his littered old desk. He belched daintily. "Excuse me," he said. "What's on your mind, T'sui?" His owlish gaze told nothing.

The Emperor moved his hand almost too quickly for the eye to follow. "The third crop of 2131 barley is in. When do you brew my perfect lager?"

A shadow passed across Strauss' face. "Damn it, T'sui," he protested. "We've had this out a dozen times. We have barely enough grain right now, properly distributed on Earth, to make next year's crop entirely sufficient in zyphase. I want to distribute what we've got to the seed co-operatives and get a full planting of it this Spring. Our schedule will be close enough as it is."

"You will brew your first wort tomorrow," said Ming T'sui with a cold fury in his tone that shriveled Tatom's nerves.

"Can't be done," Strauss said stubbornly, and his words were scarcely out of his mouth before the Emperor's short, curved sword had leaped from its scabbard. "Kneel!" he cried, raising the weapon. Its dull red alloy flashed in the indirect lighting.

"Wait!" Tatom exclaimed, in spite of Strauss' many warnings to remain silent, and leaped to his feet. He saw the blow start and ducked his head in a frenzy of fear. The incredibly hard alloy blade, sharper than any razor, snicked a lock of hair from the top of his head. His elbows struck the floor solidly.

"WAIT, you damned fool!" he heard Strauss cry angrily, his voice untainted by fear. There was a long instant of pause while Clyde waited for the next blow. It never came. He raised his head.

"We've got to malt the barley before we can brew a wort," Strauss said grumpily. "That'll take time.

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Put that nasty thing away!"

The Emperor, apparently chagrined by his exhibition of temper, sheathed the blade.

"Now, see here, T'sui," Strauss went on, still pumping back and forth in his squeaky chair. "We've been so busy growing this seed, and so careful not to lose a grain of it, that we've never played with malting it. We want to dry it the best way to preserve the zyphase. We'd better make a few test runs, and then I'll brew you up a wort. I know you, T'sui. You want to throw a big shindig and invite all the Nobles on Mars to taste your new brew before they get a crack at the new barley. Well, I guess you'll do it, or cut somebody's head off. Now, damn it, tell Clyde you're sorry. Every time your Chamberlain puts a fancy dress suit on you, you start cutting up like an Emperor."

Clyde had to admire the nerve of the older man and suppress a half-hysterical chuckle at his testy tone. Standing up cautiously, he took the Emperor's outstretched hand and winced at the steel in it.

"I am truly sorry, Clyde," Ming T'sui said. He sounded as if he meant it.

Tatom decided he might as well ape Strauss' complete informality. "Don't give it another thought, T'sui," he said easily. "We all goof off once in a while." He heard Strauss gulp, and then cover his chuckles with an obviously staged cough. A faint, cruel grin crossed Ming T'sui's face.

"Too bad your whole race was not so bold," he said, touching his golden quirt. "You might have held us off!" Stooping to pick up the lock of hair he had sliced from Tatom's thatch, he whirled on his heel, sword jingling against the jewelled belt that held it, and left them.

Clyde turned to Strauss, his stomach beginning to flutter with delayed fear from his narrow escape. The fat Brewmeister slammed his hairy fist on his desk and swore. He cursed Ming steadily for several minutes, scourging him angrily. At last he subsided. He looked over at the geneticist.

"You're a damned sight farther from your wife tonight," he declared in a grim twang, "than you've been for a long time!"

"I don't get it," Tatom said, pushing back his newly trimmed hair.

"Yas. Of course not," Strauss said grumpily. "Well, I'll have to tell you now, Clyde. From now on we're both in this up to our necks. One slip, and we both die, and not quickly. Ming might take years to finish us off."

HE swung around to his desk and fished bottles from the cold-drawer. "You told me you couldn't find a description of calcium pylos-

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terate in the standard handbooks, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"I'd better tell you where it occurs in nature. Can you guess?" He peered owlishly through his thick glasses at Tatom.

"No," Clyde said. "I've tried, but I've never had any idea."

Strauss drank from his bottle and belched softly, too small an eruption to call for an apology. "It's the major component of Baldy skeletal material," he said, "bone, in other words."

"Bone?" Tatom repeated.

"Yas, bone. You know the mutant metabolism and protoplasm are somewhat different from ours. That's their bone molecule. Calcium pylosterate. You get it now?"

Tatom's eyes flew wide open. "Yes!" he gasped. "And blood contains the same acid that zyphase causes to react with it! Zyphase is a catalyst!"

"Yes. All enzymes are catalysts. Since Baldy blood contains the same acid, any Baldy who drank beer made from zyphase malt would suffer a rapid deterioration of his skeleton. His bone would dissolve in his own blood acids faster than the anabolic process could replace it. I had hoped to infuse zyphase into a whole crop of barley, next year's crop. When the new beer was lagered and served, I would bet that ninety-nine out of a hundred Baldies on Mars would drink some before they discovered they were getting sick, let alone where the poison was coming from.

"And now this cursed T'sui insists I brew him a wort of it! I can't, obviously. Any Baldy who drank it would die. I don't want to knock off a few hundred Nobles. I want to kill the whole damned race!" He swore again, red with anger and frustration.

Tatom had a momentary surge of regret at the thought of destroying the whole race. His memory of the inherent nobility in every mutant he had ever seen argued that there was something there too good to wipe out. Then the thought of his wife, and the numberless inhuman cruelties of the Baldies hardened his heart.

"Strauss," he said with awe, "what a monstrous vengeance. And I thought Ming had you tamed! I give you my amazed apologies! What did Ming do to you?"

"I had a wife, too, Clyde," the brewer said sadly. "I lacked your good sense. I pined for her. Ming ended my grieving with the sword. He had her killed." Strauss swore softly. "And now I am to be cheated out of my revenge!"

"I'M sorry, August," Tatom said softly. "I had no idea. Wait a moment," he went on, "this is in your field, August, but I think I've got an idea."

"Yas? What is it?"

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"You know I waded through every reference you had on enzymes. I must have run across a hundred mentions of inhibitors. If I recall rightly, inhibitors are, in effect, negative catalysts, which preserve an equilibrium reaction far short of its eventual point."

"Yas."

"Well, zyphase is just the opposite. It *accelerates* a reaction to equilibrium. I can't imagine what the chemistry would be if you stuck an enzyme accelerator and an inhibitor in the same reaction, but it might slow things down, if you did it right. Could we possibly dope out an inhibitor to prevent calcium pylosterate from dissolving in blood acids, and dump some in Ming T'sui's beer? I assume this new beer really will taste different enough so that we can't afford to slip some other malt, free from zyphase, into the brew."

"Right," Strauss rasped thoughtfully. "This zyphase beer will be different, all right. I worked my fat old head off for ten years figuring out a mix of things that would let me put additional calcium into beer, plus free zyphase, and still have it taste better than any beer ever brewed. That is my real triumph." He looked up. "But maybe you have an idea, Clyde. This inhibitor business. Hm. Yes."

He lifted his big curved-stem pipe from the littered desk, filled it slowly, lighted it, puffed for many minutes, his stolid features rapt in concentration. "I have a thought," he said, almost dreamily. "I won't be able to give you much help, Clyde. You must go it alone, in the laboratory, with no Baldies to help you. We can't afford to have them know what you're after. I will stall with malting the barley. At best you have four or five months. Still, it could be done. See here." He drew a pad before him and began sketching with quick, crabbed strokes the molecular organization of calcium pylosterate, his stubby fingers marking in the molecular bonds as he jotted the symbols on the paper. Under his hands Clyde watchd a hypothetical molecule grow to compliment the structure of the calcium compound.

"Whether this exists," Strauss said, shrugging his shoulders dubiously, "or whether it could exist, I don't know. This radical I have marked 'X' could be any of a dozen things of valence two. I think, starting with tung oil extract, you might have a start. Try this." He rapidly scrawled a series of possible reactions while the younger man watched the thick, flying fingers intently.

THEIR heads remained together over the old desk until a small red Sun leaped out of the desert and cast bloody weals of light on the chilly city. By that dawn the two had laid plans for synthesis of

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an inhibitor that would prevent the zyphase reaction from taking place in the Baldy bloodstream. If it could be made, and only experiment would tell, it would be added to the beer after lagering had been well completed, else the zyphase would fail in its ostensible duty of rendering calcium pylosterate soluble in the brew.

Strauss had emphasized how unlikely it would be to achieve success in their limited time. He laid desperate plans to spoil the new lager with wild yeasts. Bare days before Ming T'sui would first sample the stuff so deadly to his race, Tatom found the answer.

"Thank our lucky stars for our facilities here," he told Strauss. "There aren't three places in the System where this synthesis could be done without losing months of time to build the equipment."

"Yas." Strauss agreed somberly. "You will need to prepare forty or fifty grams of this new stuff, Clyde, to neutralize the zyphase content of the lager. I just completed an analysis this morning. Ming will be down for the first samplings in two days. Can it be done?"

"I think so. I won't be able to sleep much, but I think so."

Their schedule proved so close that Tatom emptied and stirred the small phials of inhibitor into the tanks of aging beer while they were waiting for the Emperor to break away from a State function to join them in the dimly lighted basement of the brewery. Clyde grinned inwardly when he saw Ming T'sui's plain black tunic, realizing that they had won only by the time it took the Emperor to change from his Imperial garb.

Ming's bearing was imperial even in his plain tunic. "My very dear August," he said. "Never, in our years of pleasant relaxation together over the mysteries of malt, hops and yeast, have I looked forward to the sampling of a brew so fervently. Proceed, my good friend. Draw the first stein so that I may drink!"

Strauss turned the tap set in the tank, and the cool, naturally carbonated liquid foamed forth whitely. The three watched the heads settle on their steins, and ceremoniously raised them together. Clyde could hear Strauss guzzle above the sound of his own drinking. Ming T'sui savored his draft more delicately. He set his half-emptied stein down on the stone counter. There was an electric moment of silence. For the life of him, Tatom could not judge the savor of the brew.

"I believe," said Ming T'sui slowly, turning his cold, impassive face to the brewer. "I believe that nothing I have is quite fitting. Yes, I must have a new decoration struck, my hairy one. One only for you. This surely is your greatest triumph!"

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CLYDE could only judge the size of the triumph next morning by the size of his head. That T'sui could put it away! So could Strauss, for that matter. What a beer bust! One thing he meant to tell Strauss. If he ever decided to improve on beer again, he should try to brew the hangover out of it.

The decoration Ming T'sui had promised Strauss was presented at a reception the Emperor proudly gave for his beer-loving Nobles. For Clyde he had something that the geneticist treasured more for its appropriateness—a locket of chased iridium, containing a braided lock of hair—the very hair Ming T'sui had sliced so perilously from his head months before and had thought to take with him. Clyde began to realize how greatly Ming treasured Strauss' accomplishment when he learned that the brewer had never before been to an affair of State in his twenty-two years on the Red Planet.

Two entire years had gone by while he and Strauss had struggled together, a time in which Tatom had been largely in ignorance of Strauss' vengeful design. The fruit of their victory was almost close enough to grasp.

Strauss had measured his man well. He broached his key plan to Ming in the midst of the high spirits of the reception. This new beer was great, he argued. It had been brought about under the wing of the Emperor. Why should it not henceforth bear his name? Ming seemed to agree with scarcely a second thought to return of the two humans to Earth. They would, said Strauss, quickly supervise distribution of the seed barley among the great seed co-operatives. The next crop, he said, could thus consist wholly of the new zyphase-producing barleys. Beer, for all future time, would be better. It would be Ming T'sui lager!

Both men made the same gesture on stepping from the spaceship that returned them to their native planet, casting their eyes aloft to the blue morning sky. Strauss' square face suffused with long-deferred joy, and tears ran unashamedly down his fat cheeks, losing themselves in his lush mustache. Clyde's wife was there to meet them. The reunion was brief, for the Monitors who were to escort them through their duties harshly refused to let them delay. Once more Tatom's gorge rose with hate, and only the cruel cut of a quirt made him leave his wife's arms.

With the sceptre of Ming T'sui always behind them, accommodation of the seed co-ops was quickly gotten. They would have dared do no less, for they knew the Imperial arm was long, and its retaliation merciless.

HIS job done, Tatom returned at long last to his wife and home

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and tried to lose himself in his courses at the University. But always with him was the thought of wholesale death that would, before many months, stalk gruesomely through the ranks of the Baldies. There was an awful fascination for him in a growing field of barley, and many hours through the Spring and lengthening Summer, he sat in his car and looked at the maturing grain on nearby farms. He saw a new deadliness in the lush, thriving greenness of the fields. What wise Providence, he asked, had kept an all-accomplishing Nature from producing such deadly things before?

He heard from Strauss from time to time during the Summer as the barley ripened, and again when he called to say that he was going back to Mars to oversee the brewing.

The geneticist protested the move. "August," he told the older man, "you can't return. You should be in hiding now. Ming will have his beer made whether you are there or not, and all the other breweries on Mars will function, too. You can't afford to be on Mars when the first horrible symptoms of this poison appear. Those Baldies will figure out, quickly enough, that you are their assassin."

Strauss let the hard square lines of his face relax into a smile. "Hm," he said. "I wonder. This thing is a sort of time-bomb. Six-row barley isn't used in stout and porter, only in the lager beers, and those will be aged three to six months. Say they rush this year's brews through in three months. I still have that much time after the first fermentation is finished to wheedle another trip from Ming. Yas, I should go back, to make very sure! See here, Clyde, you had better make some wonderful discovery and ask that I come here to see it. Something we must work on here, not on Mars. We'll have time enough to go into hiding then."

In spite of Tatom's fears that Ming would not be taken in, the plan worked. Strauss returned to Earth some months later, carefully shepherding a ten-liter keg of Ming T'sui's own lager, now free of the life-saving inhibitor. He and Clyde celebrated the soon-to-be-reaped victory of humanity over the mutants with ironically ceremonial drafts of Ming T'sui lager, swilling quantities of the zyphase that they knew to be deadly to the mutants, now that the inhibitor was absent. In not many days the lagering brews on Mars would come ripe and commence to be drawn off and consumed by the bald, tyranical race of conquerors. How long it would be before the first symptoms of a rickets-like weakness would show, Strauss and Tatom did not know, but by that time they knew it would be too late for the Baldies.

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The small force of Monitors on Earth who drank in secret if at all they hoped could quickly be overthrown once it was known that the force of the great weapons of war on Mars could not be thrown against the flooding tide of human fury and vengeance.

STRAUSS and Tatom were making their last plans for flight, scarcely a week after their ceremonial drafts of Ming T'sui beer. Tatom straightened up from the bag he was packing and shoved his hair out of his face. "August," he said softly.

"Yas?" the fat brewer rasped, looking up.

"My back hurts. Does yours?"

"Yas. I'm stiff as a board. My legs, too. Guess I'm too old to pack many more bags. Too fat, too!" he chuckled.

The faint frown stayed on Tatom's face. "You don't suppose," he said thoughtfully. "That zyphase operates on the calcium in human bones, do you?"

Strauss whirled on him, fear in his icy eyes. "No!" he gasped. Then, "No," he said more calmly. "You know that an enzyme is bound to its substrate by a lock-and-key relationship. That is the fundamental fact about enzymes. They work on one reaction, and that's all. Our bone consists of an entirely different calcium molecule. It could not happen."

The geneticist shook his head. "Up to now," he said. "It has never happened. But I'm worried about these pains. They've been getting worse all day. You don't suppose that for once in nature we have found an enzyme that can be keyed to more than one reaction?"

"Never!" Strauss said stoutly. "Lock-and-key!"

"Now, think," Tatom insisted softly. "Some keys fit more than one lock. Maybe zyphase is a sort of skeleton key. You never tested it on human calcium, did you?"

"Certainly not," Strauss said, still trying to make his voice sound confident. "The laboratory article that I made synthetically, before looking for traces of zyphase occurring naturally in barley, I tested that, of course. That had no reaction. Is it possible, Tatom, that what we have identified with zyphase in the genetically altered barley is somehow different from the synthetic product? Some difference in molecular arrangement too subtle to detect on analysis? No! That's unthinkable. I can't believe it." He fell silent, rubbing his aching hip. "Still," he said. "We had better check."

LATE that night they stood poised over the retort in the University laboratory as Strauss added a "zyphase" extract from the beer he had brought with him from Mars to human blood serum in

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which a section of bone from a laboratory skeleton was immersed. Hours of tense, fearful watching passed before the first surface erosion of the bone could be seen, but by then there was no doubt in their minds that they had loosed on an unsuspecting humanity the same dread death they had planned for the mutants.

Strauss raised his head in the thin artificial light, drained pale by the breaking dawn. "I wonder," he said, his voice choked and bitter. "Does this stuff work on mutant calcium? I know it shouldn't. But now I *want* it to be a skeleton key." Tatom shook his head in doubt. "Thank Heaven for small favors," Strauss went on. "Not all humans, by a long sight, drink beer. A hell of a lot of them use malt, though, either as dough flavoring in bread, or as a diet supplement. Especially children," he groaned. "We must make the inhibitor at once!"

"No, August," Tatom said. "We could never get away with it. I told you before that facilities simply don't exist, except in two or three laboratories. We could never hide the enormous effort it would be to prepare enough to protect all those who became exposed. The Baldies would discover it at once. I say that because I am convinced they, too, are affected by the poison. The chemistry of this genetic zyphase is so similar to the synthetic product that I am confident it causes their bone to dissolve, too."

He rose and walked to a cupboard in the laboratory which he unlocked with a key on his chain. He took a bottle of white crystals from a shelf and relocked the cabinet. Strauss watched him silently as he lit a burner and began to heat a length of glass tubing over its hot flicker, eventually blowing two small bubbles. He severed them with a glowing platinum wire, allowed them to cool, and then filled their tiny interiors from the bottle of white crystals. Strauss saw him seal their thin necks expertly in the flame. He handed one to the brewer.

"Put it in your mouth," Tatom said.

"Cyanide?" Strauss inquired.

"Yes. We may be caught. We must make an attempt to make as much inhibitor as possible, and to warn all humanity against the beer, or anything made from this year's crop of six-row barley. If Ming finds us first, he will surely try to torture from us how we kept him from dying when he first drank beer made from zyphase barley. We must take that secret to the grave."

Their plan bore no fruit. Rushing down the laboratory steps to Tatom's car, they saw two tunicked Baldies running toward them, their every lineament showing deadly purpose.

"Now?" demanded Strauss, the

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glass bubble of death clicking against his teeth.

"Not yet," Tatom groaned in a low tone. "We may still have a chance." The Monitors seized them wordlessly.

The Emperor was on Earth, they quickly discovered, waiting for them at the spaceport. They needed no further proof that zyphase affected Baldies as well as humans. They were conducted to his presence.

MING T'sui sat stiffly in his full regalia. His sword was by his side, slung out of his way on the ornately carved chair that was temporarily serving him as a throne. His color was bad, Clyde saw, recognizing that the tyrant's entire calcium metabolism by this time was in disrepair. His long, cruel face was contorted in pain, pain that the Spartan mutants had been taught to bear without opiates or without flinching. The dull, growing aches throughout the geneticist's body echoed what he saw so plainly writ on Ming's features.

The Emperor's voice came in a tortured rasp from his throat. "Welcome, August," he said, touching his golden quirt. "Welcome, Clyde."

Strauss bowed deeply, a smile of bitter triumph curling his lip, and rose on Ming's command. Almost from nowhere, a Baldy attendant stood before the two humans, holding a tray that bore two foaming steins of beer. Tatom felt his stomach twist at the thought of the poison it contained.

But Strauss reached forward readily and raised the stein to his Emperor. "Long life!" he said ringingly, and drained the seidel. Tatom forced the tingling, pleasantly bitter draught down his throat, wiping the head from his lips with the back of his hand.

"A remarkable time to show me obeisance," the Emperor observed acridly.

"Then you know?" Strauss asked twangily.

"Yes. We know. And worst of all, now I know what my scientists tell me is true. This deadly stuff harms none but us. You have been clever beyond all humans in our experience. Your death, as becomes your fame, shall be unbearably protracted."

Strauss grinned sadly from his square features. "I had hoped to avoid that at your hands, T'sui, but I see that I have lost that small gambit. The game, however, is mine."

"Are you sure?" Ming demanded.

"Certainly," Strauss lied. "There is no cure for the poison your whole race has by now taken. You will all die, and shortly, I think, if you are any example of the condition of your fellows."

"Wrong, August," the tyrant croaked painfully. "We will not all

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die. Our children will live, few though they are, and young." His slanted black eyes narrowed to slits in his faded face.

Strauss waved the objection away with his hairy hand. "We shall kill them in some other way," he declared. "Their strength will not be enough, T'sui. They alone cannot run your engines of warfare."

"Ah, right, my fat little friend," Ming replied. "But before we die, my Nobles and I shall correct that disparity by as complete an annihilation of humanity on all three planets as our fading strength will permit. Better all should die than you should thus deal with your masters!"

CLYDE saw Strauss' face fall, and knew from it that the Brewmeister believed the Emperor fully capable of carrying out the threat. He saw the fat man square his shoulders resolutely.

"It won't work, T'sui," he said! "Unless you kill us all. Now, that we know this way to kill your kind, our techniques are such that we can introduce this poison into virtually any food. A few scattered seeds of poisoned grain in your own fields would in time contaminate your whole crop!"

"Then *all* must die!" the Emperor croaked.

"Wait!" Clyde cried.

"Once you nearly lost your head, my impetuous friend," Ming T'sui observed, his face twisting in pain. "This time you may speak."

"Suppose there were a way to save you from this poison," Tatom demanded. "Could we make a bargain?"

"You trifle with me," Ming said hollowly. "There is no way."

"But recall," Tatom replied. "You drank beer made with 2131 barley many months ago, without harm. It was treated in a way to save you from the poison. And you might as well forget about torturing the method from us. We both have cyanide capsules between our teeth. You will never lay a hand on us." The pause that followed told that every breath was bated.

"What would you be willing to give in return for the secret of the cure for the poison?" Tatom demanded of Ming.

"Name what you will," Ming T'sui rasped sickly.

"That humans and mutants interbreed to form a new and greater race," the geneticist said. "That there be a public policy that members of both races, while they still exist, and the mixed races, before it becomes the only race, share equally in government and freedom."

"But you know this thing cannot be," Ming T'sui insisted. "It has been tried. The matings are sterile."

Tatom grinned happily. "That's

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what I thought until a few moments ago," he agreed. "But then I recalled the techniques we developed to alter the heredity of barley. They are perfectly adaptable to mammalian heredity. Without the sacrifice of qualities that make either race great, and choosing among them as we will, in terms of appearance, temperament, mentality, we can breed in future generations humans and mutants who can mate successfully."

Ming T'sui smiled distantly. "You must be desperate yourself," he said. "Or you would never propose something that would leave you so much in our power, after we had once been cured."

"Not so," Tatom replied, flinching inwardly at the accuracy of Ming's deduction. "Your race needs us. Our skills are not your skills. We can, with what we now know, always find a way by some other enzyme poison, to destroy your people. You cannot kill us all before we could retaliate in a surely lethal way. Thus you need us alive and dare not try to wipe us out. And we must breed into your race, or continue down the road to extinction we have been treading these last two centuries. I think we have a deal."

Ming T'sui nodded, his face paling with agony. "It is done," he said.

IN their first moment alone together following their release to prepare the inhibitor in quantity and time to save the Baldies from extinction, Strauss spoke excitedly to Tatom.

"We must hurry. The poison is far more advanced on Mars than here. It will be weeks before the first general symptoms appear among humans. Even with Ming's order to destroy every trace of this year's barley crop, some is already in processing. We must secretly get a part of our output of inhibitor and see to it that it is properly distributed. Ming T'sui must never know."

"Why not?" asked Tatom.

Strauss grinned squarely. "Their standards are very high, but in some ways their idea of right and wrong differs from ours. If Ming T'sui knew that we had bluffed him all along, that we needed his help to make inhibitor for sick humans as well, he would call the deal off right now."

Tatom returned his grin. "You told me that after politics, the Baldies considered gambling the most proper pursuit for a Noble. They may be great gamblers, August, but I think they leave their skill at bluffing behind them at the card tables. Humans have something to be said in their favor, after all!"

THE END

COMING:

SPECIAL "SURPRISE" ISSUE WATCH FOR IT

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A short time ago the Columbia University Press set off a nation-wide editorial hullaballoo with the discovery that "Pilgrim's Progress" is the dullest of the world's most boring classics. Fourth in the list of ten top turnips is Spenser's "Faerie Queene."

This calumny might stand had Fletcher Pratt and L. Sprague de Camp not cast a new light on the matter with their treatise THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER, first published by Holt in 1941 and now out in a brand new edition (*Prime Press, Philadelphia*, 1950. 326p. $2.50). If there is anything less dull than the misadventures of Harold Shea and Dr. Reed Chalmers among the assorted witches, warlocks, sprites, knights, and delectable damsels of the Faerie Queene, it is their initial brush with frost giants et al in the world of Norse mythology which opens the book. The trouble with Columbia is that the professors can't read between the lines the way Pratt and de Camp can. And to pile meringue on the lemon pie, Messrs Shea and Chalmers not a little hampered by one Vaclav Polacek (alias "the Rubber Czech"), have gone on to shoot a little adrenalin into still another venerable classic, Lodovico Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso," in a newly enlarged and enhanced sequel, THE CASTLE OF IRON (*Gnome Press, New York*, 1950, 224 p. $2.50).

As a matter of fact, from the time the magazine versions of the Shea stories began to appear ten years ago, they have had the die-hard fantasts squirming on their beds of spikes. These gentlemen maintain stoutly that science fiction is merely a misbegotten offshoot of fantasy, for the most part plodding in imagination, lacking in any literary value, and allowed into the family only if it will keep to itself in an attic room with the rats. With one gleeful swat Pratt and de Camp obliterated this bee in the fantasts' bonnet by inventing a use for symbolic logic which makes it possible to enter any conceivable world, however fantastic. Ever since THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER appeared, fantasy has been just another suburb of science fiction.

Using their symbolic logic to convince themselves of the basic assumptions of another world, Shea and Chalmers, trying for the Ireland of Cuchulinn and Queen Maev, land first in the bleak realm of the Norse gods and get their basic training in magic. Escaping by the skin of their teeth on the verge of Ragnarok, they refuse to let well enough alone and this time tangle with the complicated and hectic goings-on in Faerie. This time they get souvenirs —Shea the huntress Belphebe and Chalmers the snow-maiden Florimel. Thus endeth the first volume.

In THE CASTLE OF IRON Shea is dragged into Orlando's realm of Frankish and Saracen sorcery by Chalmers' attempts to convert Florimel into a less perishable medium, after a tantalizingly brief stop-off in Coleridge's Xanadu. Belphebe, with magical amnesia, is now Belphegor. Polacek's fumbling experiments with magic keep turning him into a werewolf. Shea finds it necessary to psychoanalyze the medieval Frankish hero, Roland, to make peach brandy in a helmet, and to improvise a flying carpet. If it doesn't quite add up to the hectic hullaballoo of THE INCOMPLETE ENCHANTER, there's nothing any closer. And dammit, *it's science fiction!* —*P. Schuyler Miller*

Science fiction anthologies are always popular with editors who make a living (?) compiling them, and collectors who buy them—except bad ones of course. Currently available are two worthwhile anthologies and

(*Continued on page* 100)

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WATER FOR MARS

By Stanley Mullen

Deep within the bowels of Mars' tiny moons lay certain death for a hunted man and woman—and a secret that meant life for uncounted millions.

Illustration by H. W. McCauley

THE girl on the visicast screen was singing "The Gray Moon of Death." It was her voice that attracted Tolver's attention to her, just as it had the first time he saw her. She was Cilte Thenobar. Recognition was instant and complete. Conditions were vastly different this time — and the fact that she had come out of hiding explained the two killers who had shadowed him all day.

Eyes narrowed, Tolver watched the two men. They were easy to spot, making the most unconvincing idlers he could imagine. Their efforts to appear natural merely amused him, but stalking was grim business to an agent of Martian Security Police. He would deal with these two playmates when the time came. Ignoring them, he sought the nearest visiphone booth, stopped and waited for the girl to finish her song.

For a situation so charged with potential violence, the setting was extremely peaceful. The booth was on a high terrace of the outermost tower in Canal City III, overlooking a tremendous vista of ancient canal, now only partially filled with water laboriously pumped from the sparse snowcaps of the Pole. Beyond the canal, where an ancient, nameless river had once emptied into a forgotten sea, hydroponic gardens rioted over slopes which would soon be as barren again as they had been a thousand millenia.

Abruptly, the song ended on a note of lingering nostalgia. Tolver dialed, waiting impatiently for the connection. The screen clicked, blurred, cleared. The face which had just vanished from the large visicast screen on the terrace appeared. She stared at him angrily, and eyes which could flash devils stabbed into his.

"Surprised, Cilte?" Tolver asked. "Didn't you expect to hear from me again?"

"Not . . . after what happened."

"It's because of what happened. And what hasn't happened yet."

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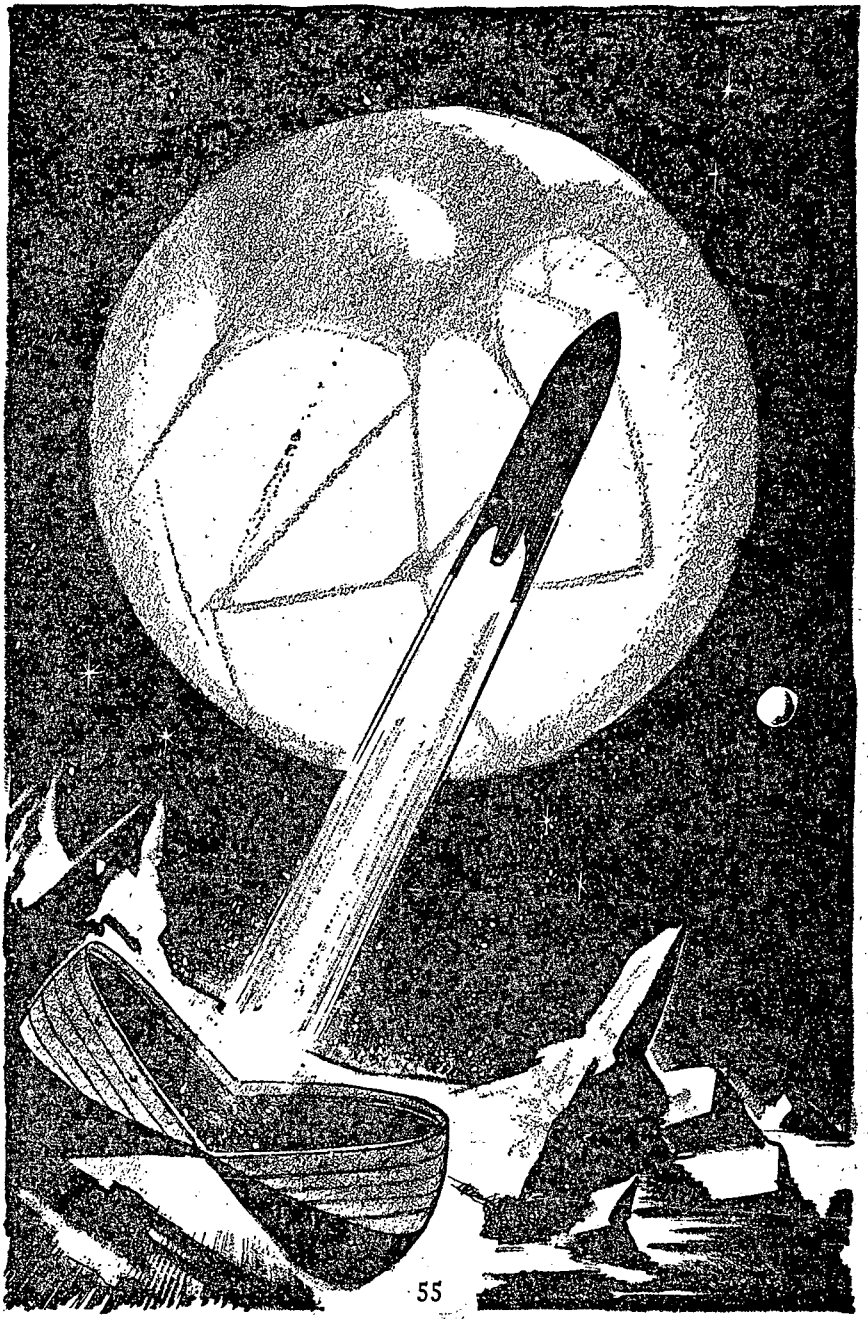

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"I don't know what you mean."

Tolver laughed harshly. "Yes, you do. Never set a jackal to kill a wolf. Your jackals are still with me, but they haven't nerve to start anything . . . . while I keep to crowded places. I'm not a fool, Cilte. The dead don't talk. So I'm talking while I can. I'm sending a full report on you to Security headquarters. It covers you and your pals. The charge is sabotage of the canal pumping stations; virtually treason, with a sentence of death. It means the killing pens, the disintegrators."

A cold shadow crossed the face in the screen. In her strange way, Cilte Thenobar was beautiful. Narrow eyes slanted upward to exquisitely chiselled cheekbones, the face itself an exotic mask whose sensuous, cruel mouth could smile languidly and promise a man paradise while opening for him the gates of his private hell. She was not smiling now.

"I see. Why do you tell me this?"

"Because a man likes to see the woman who betrayed him squirm a little. You counted on my being soft, too much in love to send you to the disintegrators. For you, I threw away everything that meant anything to me. I'm resigning from the Security Police but I'll set the hounds on you first. My report goes first into a timed mail-vault, which will mail it automatically in twelve hours. My resignation goes in now, and you know what that will mean. I salve my conscience and give you a headstart of twelve hours. If either of us is in the city by the time that report is delivered, we'll be picked up by the SP. And your side will be gunning for both of us, because they'll think you sold them out to me. We'll make a fine pair of fugitives, Cilte. Just twelve hours!"

Cilte Thenobar paled. Her face changed as the mask of beauty dissolved, turned ugly with fear.

"You wouldn't do that," she wailed. "Where could I go in twelve hours? No one can leave the city without a pass. You're trying to frighten me to get even."

"Don't count on it," warned Tolver grimly. "I don't care what happens to you. But I want to see you white with fear, running, realizing how hopeless it is. I have a pass. It's forged, but I advise you to risk it. You'll have it by direct mail in about ten minutes. A pass to the further moon, Deimos. Use it or not, as you like. I won't tell you where I'm going. I don't trust you. So maybe I'll see you on Deimos. Maybe not. I'm hiding out."

Cilte sneered. "If you're trying to trick me into going away with you, I'll kill you myself——"

Tolver's reply was savage, scornful. "You won't have the chance. And don't kid yourself I want any part of you. I hate your guts. Not only did I get the dope on your

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political gangster friends, I learned plenty about you. Who you are, *what you are!* Why you're so interested in wrecking the pumps . . . "

"You couldn't know *that*." Her acrid syllable held a note of hysteria, but Cilte bit her lip and held control. "I'm not ashamed of anything I've done. If you got caught in the gears, that's the fortunes of war. If you know what you say you do, then you should understand. I hate you. I hate your people. I don't want any favors. I don't want your forged pass. I don't want anything from you . . . "

Tolver shrugged brutally. "Suit yourself. I'll send it along anyhow. Think it over. The penalty for any Red Martian found in the Canal Cities is immediate execution."

TOLVER rang off. He left the booth and ran toward the moving walks. Skipping nimbly over the slow-moging outer walks, he reached the inner lanes which ran crosstown at eighty miles an hour. The two shadows forsook their pretense of idle innocence and raced after him. But his action had taken them by surprise. The inerval it took for them to reach the walks gave him a headstart.

The tracks of the moving belts led across a steel spiderweb bridging the gulf between buildings. Tolver reached the next city-tower with minutes to spare.

An elevator sped him to the mail terminal floor. Removing his SP badge, he dropped it into an envelope with folded sheets of paper. Into another envelope he placed the forged pass, closed the flaps and ran both through an addressing machine where they were impregnated with electronic inks to guide them automatically through the compressed air mail-chutes to their destinations. One went into direct mail. The other into a time-vault locker with dials set for a twelve hour delay. It was none too soon.

Lift doors banged open and his shadows reappeared. This time there was no mistaking deadly intent. Both men whipped small, blunt-snouted heat guns from overlarge pockets. Tolver dodged as the guns flamed, throwing himself flat on the floor. The nearest bank of mail vaults vanished in blinding glare. Swiftly Tolver dogwalked through open glass doors onto another terrace.

Glass doors fused as they shattered behind him, collapsing into a glowing pool on the tiles. Tolver leaped to his feet and sprinted for the parapet wall. A hissing beam of heat raced him. The searing blast licked his hair and singed his eyelashes as he vaulted over. Showering drops of molten stone went with him. They stung like acid wherever one touched naked skin. His tunic smoked.

Tolver hoped it was no more than one story to the next lower

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terrace. Fortunately the tower was built in set-back stories. It was two full floors down, and his stomach wrapped itself around his spine during the drop. The landing jolt shook him like a blow on the skull but he struck into a running crouch and got under cover of the floor above before the marksmen upstairs could take aim. Into the nearest elevator he staggered, throwing both bars full over for an express descent. The car dropped out from under him, plunging three floors so abruptly that only then did his feet touch the bottom of the cage.

Somewhere above, the shaft rocked with the force of another heat-gun blast. He grinned. Let the tower-police take care of the fireworks fiends. By the time they got through explaining, it would be much too late to follow him.

At the third underground level, Tolver stopped the car, got out and searched for the mailroom. A third envelope remained to be sent. He addressed it, dropped the letter into the chute for direct mail. He wondered if Cilte Thenobar would be on Deimos and how long it would take her to get there. He hoped she had taken the bait.

MARS hung overhead like a titanic luminous circle on a painted canopy. Curious conflicts of orientation arose in Cilte as the freighter edged closer to the outer moon. The planet was still so large and the moon so tiny that she felt more as if the ore-ship were rising from Mars than descending upon Deimos. The confusion of mind lent the scene a bottom-side-up unreality.

"We'll be docking in a few minutes," the officer beside her said. "Doesn't look very inviting, does it?"

The rough and jagged globe of iron gray shone silvery with dull light, broken and diffused by the savage textures of its surface. At the moment, the sun was on the far side of the moon, and most of the eerie illumination was reflected from the bright rust-orange circle of Mars. However, the moon was rotating very rapidly and a harsh crescent of blinding radiance crept swiftly from a close and jaggedly metallic horizon. In moments now the inhospitable features of the five-mile sphere would be clearly revealed in a deluge of sunlight. Cilte shuddered.

"It's terrifying," she murmured. "I'm glad no one has to live on the outside surface."

The clumsy cargo-spaceship nosed through a double airlock and down a long radilume-lined tube which led to the subsurface mining colonies. These were operated by the outlawed mining syndicate and held in open defiance of the constituted Martian authorities. There was no law on Deimos but the will

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of the company, and it served as uneasy asylum for renegades and outlaws of both red and white races. Trade existed between Deimos and the surface of Mars, but only on sufferance, without legal recognition.

Momentary weightlessness flurried Cilte's stomach as she stood by the ports watching the ship maneuver to the landing stages. Artificial gravity had been turned off in the ship, and bells rang in the corridors to notify the few passengers that the moon-terminal had been reached. Now that the 14,000 mile space-flight was over, Cilte felt suddenly sick. She wondered why she had come; intellectually, it puzzled her, but emotionally she knew the reason. She had come because she hated Tolver. There was a chance that he would be here.

Jed Tolver might even be here ahead of her, possibly waiting for her. She hoped he was on Deimos —for there was a long score to be settled between them. As a Red Martian desert-dweller, Cilte Thenobar could hate with every fiber of being. If she lived, she promised herself, she would find him and even the account between them. All of her dreams shattered, all her hopes of rebuilding her scattered and dying race into a great people, by diverting to their needs a small part of the precious water supply stolen from them by the greedy canal cities. The work and dreams of years brought to nothing by one man . . .

No, she was not through with him. The mining colonies of Deimos were open ground, where white Earth refugee and red Martian could meet on equal ground. Here —where the people of the five inhabited worlds rubbed elbows in forced abeyance of their mutual hatred—would be as good a place as any to deal with Tolver. Here she might have powerful allies, and Jed Tolver would be one man, alone . . .

WITH much noise and bumping the massive freighter slid into its cradle. A plastic gang-plank reached out from the landing stage. Cilte was ready to disembark. She had left quickly, with no more baggage than a small hand-purse, which contained money and cosmetics and a tiny heat-gun.

Dock workmen paused to watch her descend the plank. She was worth watching. Now that further disguise as a "White Martian" was unnecessary, Cilte had reverted to type. She had removed the bleaching agent with chemical, and cosmetically enhanced the glow of natural red-gold skin coloring. Her eyes shone more catlike than ever against that complexion; enriched by the soft rustiness of a sand-leopard cloak thrown carelessly across her shoulders. Barbaric jewelry of gold and copper-mesh, studded with emerald and diamond

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gemfires splintered light from wrist and ankle as she moved gracefully to the dock.

Officialdom, in the person of an anaemic youth with strawlike hair, grinned at her, appraisingly.

"You're expected, of course?" he said, carelessly checking her papers. "Husband with you?"

Cilte remembered to lie. "He should be here . . . to meet me," she replied, eyeing the clerk coldly.

The man's laugh was brash, nasty. "Lots of husbands forget to come. Maybe they're tired of their wives, or something. Some send the wives ahead, promising to meet them—then never show up. One way to get rid of 'em, I guess."

"Get rid of them?" Cilte echoed. "But I don't understand. Can't they just go back home?"

His answer was a sadistic cackle. "Nobody ever goes home from Deimos. It's easy to get here—not so easy to leave. The ships come out empty; on the trip back, they're loaded with ores. Figure it out for yourself. Company's not anxious about having tourists. Anybody can come, work or fit in somehow. If you can carry your load, all right. If not, the company's not concerned with you. Most dames like you that turn up alone . . . well, eventually, they land in Pleasure City, or jump down a shaft somewhere. Lots of 'em lie about having husbands; at least when they first come. Later, it doesn't matter. Why d'you think they call Deimos 'the Gray Moon of Death' . . . or haven't you heard?"

"I—I've heard the song," Cilte faltered, adjusting her mind rapidly. "Somehow the connection hadn't occurred to me."

"It will. That's why I hoped you were expected," the youth said. He watched her pass onto the platforms, shrugged and turned his attention to other passengers. Too bad . . .

THE sharp odor of overheated iron caught her nostrils as Cilte stood in the shadow of a pillar, waiting. There was no sign of Jed Tolver on the platforms. Slowly the small flood of newly arrived workmen descended from the ship and dissolved into the maze of burrows, seeking tubes to one working or another. A few headed into the city sector for a final round of pleasure before plunging into the slavery below. At last Cilte stood alone, and the shrouding silence of catacombs surrounded her.

The mining colonies were vast warrens, built completely underground; a series of pressurized caverns artificially heated, lighted and ventilated. It was a world upside-down, for the gravity was reversed, partly supplied by the speed of Deimos' rapid rotation, augmented by gravity-motors lining the outer surface. Below was up as far as gravity was concerned; the floors would have been the ceilings of a

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normal world. The outer levels were the city-levels, where life went on much the same as in surface cities; inside them, one climbed by stair or elevator to the inner level, above which were slopes and drifts, shafts and galleries, the terrifying mazes in which men slaved out a troglodyte existence for which even the fantastically high pay could not wholly compensate. Beyond, still higher or lower according to the confusion of terms, were ancient workings, long abandoned, which had not recently been used and were never thoroughly explored.

While the outer layers were unusually rich in rare minerals, these thinned out with increasing depth until the crust fused gradually into the cheap nickel-iron mass of the core. It was believed that the inner workings had been exhausted of value long before the present history of Mars began; seismic tests revealed the moon-core to be almost pure nickel-iron, and the mining syndicate confined its projects to the outer eight levels — since such common material was not worth tapping, and would not, even in pure state, pay freighting charges to Mars.

As the silence increased around her, Cilte's uneasiness grew by leaps and bounds. Someone should have met her. Even Jed Tolver would be welcome at the moment, though she reserved judgment for any future arrangements between them.

A stealthy movement among the pillar-shadows caught her eye. With a cry, she ran forward.

It was not Jed Tolver. Two men stepped from the shadows. Too late, she recognized them. Even as she turned to run, one of them snatched her arm, swung her roughly around, clapped a horny hand over her mouth. The other thrust a blaster gun deep into her side. Cilte stopped struggling.

"Where are you taking me?" she whispered angrily, words muffled by the hand.

Prodding her with the blaster, the pair marched her ahead of them into the maze of columns. Stumbling, Cilte cursed them in two languages. Without difficulty, she recognized them as mining syndicate killers. Inspiration told her that they were the two men sent after Tolver in Canal City III, with orders to kill. At the time, she had not believed his story, but pieces clicked into place. Rusty, rubrous haze hung among the pillars. Cilte's profanity should have turned it blue.

"Shut up!" a voice hissed. The blaster muzzle jabbed to emphasize the command. "Did you think you and your boy friend could escape us so easily?"

Cilte raged. "You fools! I'm trying to find and kill him myself. After your bungling on Mars . . . ."

The killer exhaled, the sound something between a laugh and a

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snarl. "No dice, sister. We got orders. You're bait on the trap, and a nice piece of cheese at that. When he comes after you, you both get it. Pouf! Just like that."

The trio followed a line of glowing radilumes. Tears of fury and exasperation in her eyes, Cilte went sullenly ahead . . .

FROM his vantage point behind an iron support, Jed Tolver watched Cilte's capture. Then began a skillful game of shadowing in the maze of columns.

The confusion of catacombs made it fatally easy to lose sight of the quarry. Tolver dared not follow too closely, lest he give his game away. Fortunately, they seemed to follow a direct path marked by guiding lines of radilumes.

The route led to another tube station platform. Tolver dared not press close enough to see what happened. He could hear the lid open in one of the torpedo-like robo-cars, then slam and lock. There was a sharp whine as the car slid down a short incline into a main tube where it linked to the magnetic impulses running in endless chains along the metal-walled tube.

The whistling scream of the departing robo-car still hung in the lifeless air as Tolver sprinted onto the platform, but he was too late to see which of several tubes had been used.

In bafflement, he studied the various openings. Luminous hieroglyphs above their entrances were mocking, unenlightening. Suddenly, inspiration came.

Selecting an entrance at random, he vaulted the railing and slid down the inclined tracks to the tunnel. Gingerly, he ran cautious fingers over the channels where the car bearings had rested, getting himself thoroughly grimed in the process. He did not find what he wanted on the first track. Three more channels told him nothing. The fifth was hot, blistering his fingers.

Floundering up the incline, he eased another robocar into position, climbed in and slammed down the lid. It dipped, ran onto the main tracks and sped off in hot pursuit. Miles hurtled backward at terrific speed. A warning bell signalled a station. Tolver pushed a selector stud, disengaged the magnetic link and the car whirled up a ramp, stopped silently against the cushion-bumpers.

A lone attendant, sweeping the platform, scowled at Tolver's grime-smeared clothes.

"By what authority——"

Word-flow stopped as he saw the gun. "Did two men and a girl get out here?"

The man shrugged, grimly estimated Tolver, the gun, the tone of authority. "Security Police don't cut any weight here," the attendant said. "I don't have to answer that?"

"You think I won't shoot?"

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"Not you. The noise would bring people. Too many for you to shoot. Put that thing away."

Tolver put the gun back into its shoulder holster, then moved like lightning. Pinning the startled attendant against an empty robo-car, he waved a menacing fist in the man's face, then caught his arm, twisting it upward against his back. "Now, talk!" he ordered savagely. "We'll dispense with formalities."

THE attendant gesticulated wildly down a dim-lit corridor.

Tolver eased the pressure. "What's down there?"

"Elevators. Some to the deeper mines. Some to the offices of the company. Funny place to take a girl." He leered.

Tolver grinned and released his victim. He fumbled a solar credit note of large denomination from his tunic pocket and held it folded under the man's nose. The attendant stared.

"Why didn't you say it was important?" the man asked, his eyes hotly following the movement of the note, fascinated. "I don't know what goes on here, Mister. Honestly, I don't. I'm new in the job. They had company passes. For three. Nobody is supposed to go on from here without passes. Now you know as much as I do; maybe more."

"Is it possible to send a message to Mars?" Tolver asked. "From here?"

"That depends. If the company OKs it, yes. A helio can be relayed through from here."

"Who decides on the OK?"

"I do." The man reached for the bill. "I don't want to get mixed up in anything," he added dubiously.

He watched while Tolver scribbled a note in code on the face of the bill. "Never mind what you're mixed up in. Just send it. If that message gets through, there'll be another bill to match it when I get back."

The attendant's eyes flickered hungrily. "With two like this, I could bribe my way back to Mars," he muttered. "But you won't get back."

"Better send that, if you want to get back to Mars, out of this hellhole. If you send it, I'll be back. And maybe," he promised fatefully, "I'll be back if you don't . . . "

The attendant put the folded note in his pocket, resumed his sweeping. "I'll think about it. At least, enough to look the other way while you sneak past. You've bought that." Tolver said nothing, studying the man. He was an unlikely ally, but no better offered. Deliberately, the attendant turned his back.

At the end of the corridor, a bank of elevators faced the platform. The last on the right was still moving. Tolver watched its indicator arrow turn all the way.

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The innermost level. He whistled.

Imagination paused at thought of the sleek and be-jeweled Cilte Thenobar in the inner levels of Deimos.

From their indicators, most of the elevators went to the same destination. Three at the left, marked with curious heiroglyphs, went further. These must be to the ancient workings. They showed little signs of recent use. Tolver entered one, pressed the stud on full and awaited developments. The polished metal sides of the shaft slid past endlessly. At level eight, Tolver worked the stud for automatic stop. The stud refused to move. Ascent continued at high speed.

FRANTICALLY, Tolver leaned on the stud. It was jammed hard.

At such speed the automatic stops would never function and the car would crash through the inner end of the shaft. As a last resort, Tolver tried hammering the stud with the butt of his blaster gun. The stud snapped like glass and rattled on the car-floor.

Lighted numerals flashed on the board. Level 14. With a sickening crash, muffled by speed, the automatic brake fittings tore from the shaft-walls. Steel shrieked. The hurtling car rammed something. Hard. Concussion jarred Tolver to the last bone in his body. The car plunged, its direction reversed.

Shrill whining rose from the guide channels at the side of the shaft. Overheated metals expanded, took hold. The car slowed as guides dragged through channels that were melting, fusing. The sound rose in volume, deafening, intolerable. At intervals, the car jolted as its impact struck minor obstacles from its path. The dragging guides would flow soon, or carry away.

Tolver cut the intensity of his blaster, directed its beam into the hole from which the stud had broken. Perhaps it would melt switches, short circuit, work the controls. Brakes took hold, screaming like demons. The car hesitated. One dragging guide grabbed, solidified as fusing metal flowed together and crystalized. The car jerked, twisted, burst through the side of the shaft in a shattering confusion of tortured metal and violence.

Tolver was thrown free in a deluge of broken quartz-glass and jangling gouts of hot metal. The platform was wrecked, showered with twisted, broken supports, debris from the collapsing shaft walls, oddments of machinery. Cut and bleeding, Tolver dug out of the ruins. His leather space togs had saved him from worse injury, but he was sick and dazed from shock. The platform was in total darkness. From a pocket he dug a hand radilume, flashed it around him. There was just the platform, sur-

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rounded by dark openings of mine tunnels. Tracks, with rusting ore-cars still on them, led into the darkness. There was nothing else.

On one wall glinted an ancient hieroglyphic, once scribed with radilume paint, now dark save when the light reflected from it. The old symbol, used by long dead miners, to mark the level number. Tolver recognized it. The symbol for Level 10. He was in the old workings.

Two levels below would be Cilte Thenobar and her captors. It was vital to reach her at once, to learn what had happened. The first thing was to locate a stairway, if one still existed, and work his way to Level Eight. What action he could take, once there, was another matter. He did not stop to dwell upon such an abstract thought.

With luck, there would be a stairway.

He began exploring, trying one mine-tunnel after another. If his luck was out, and there was no stairway, he might still try to lower himself down the black, empty shaft. There was a possibility that all entrances and exits to the old workings had been sealed up by company orders. It was a possibility he did not like to face.

He located the stairway, finally, but it might almost as well have been back on Mars. A gulf of awful blackness yawned between him and it, a deep abyss he would have to jump. He backed up and made the attempt. On the edge, loose rock turned under his foot. There was a sickening moment of suspension on nothing . . .

THE elevator stopped at Level Eight. Its door slid open with a sharp click. Heldas stopped to set the controls at "Hold," but Thol's blaster gun nudged Cilte Thenobar from the car onto a wide circular platform. Half of the expanse was ore depot, dimly lighted except near the shaft. Huge bulks of electric ore-cars seemed like blunt monsters crouching about the walls and huddled into dark tunnel mouths. Angular patterns of shadow lay across the intricately railed area.

The other half of the platform resembled a city-station. It was more comfortably fitted, brilliantly lighted, and set with moving walks. Cilte's captors, Thol and Heldas, urged her ahead of them onto the walks, selecting one marked with an impressive hieroglyph. The walk disappeared into a harshly lighted hallway, past bleak and incredibly dirty quarters assigned to workers, on past other rooms in which technicians labored to serve the giant, robot-like machines which rumbled and hissed like monsters out of Mars' dragon-haunted past.

The zombie-like figures of workers trudged wearily about, paying no heed to the trio on the moving walks. Cilte knew that any appeal

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to the workers for help was useless. It would scarcely be heeded, and if it were, would bring only swift death from Thol's ready blaster.

Beyond the worker's section, the corridor widened, opening into a warehouse and office section. Here, the prodding blaster forced Cilte from the walk. They paused outside a door, while a scanner beam checked their identities, their passes, and reported its mechanical findings on a screen inside. The door buzzed and slid open.

Inside, diffused light shone through hangings of translucent emerald metal-cloth, into which had been woven fluorescent threads to give illusion of a fantastic submarine background. This was no office, but a luxurious apartment, with furnishings of plastic, beaten metal, and Kru-leather. Crouched over a table, completing some adjustment on a delicate, intricate mechanism, was a huge man, white and very pale of skin, with a shock of unruly bronze hair. He raised up to greet his visitors.

"Well, Cilte——"

"Vorga!" she gasped. "What are you doing here?"

Cal Vorga laughed. "You're no longer in a position to ask the questions, Cilte. There are many things about our little alliance you were never told. Naturally and fortunately, since you chose to have dealings with the police. Police are our natural enemies, whatever use you may have found for one of them. This is not our hideout, as you may have imagined, but our headquarters. I worked with you, while it served my purpose, but your organization of Red Martians was never anything but a willing dupe to my scheme of disrupting the water supply to the Canal Cities."

"You always were a swine, Vorga," Cilte said, coldly angry. "I never trusted you, but could not convince my co-workers that you were not a true friend, but a scoundrel plotting against us as viciously as have the people of the Canal Cities. I think I knew, even then, that your eventual purpose was to disrupt the cities, cause chaos and confusion there, and then steal the water we had taken back only because it belonged to us."

"Woman's intuition?" mocked Vorga. "The more *fool* you, then, if you guessed my purpose and were helpless to do anything about it while you had the chance."

THERE was no fear in Cilte now. Straight, clean and deadly as a lance, she stood before Vorga, her eyes bleak and cold and heartless as a Martian desert night.

"Yes, I knew. I sensed the truth and still I failed. My people die slowly," went on the toneless words, "because of you and others like you. Along the old canals, the cities re-built by Earth refugees

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grew fat with water pumped from our reserves in the polar region. Because that water was stolen from us, my own people—the true Martians—have to die in their tents, must forsake the underground cities and exist like beggars in the desert. But my folk breed strong. We will fight you as we have fought the other alien parasites who rob us of our birthright. We will lie and cheat and steal, we will kill in the dark, we will wage continuous guerilla warfare; and while one of us lives, none of you shall sleep peacefully at night. You have bested me, and others of my organization, but in the end, for all your lies and trickery, we will learn. It will come to open warfare. Kill me, but others will take my place."

Vorga applauded, then laughed scornfully. "Bravely said—but if I paid any attention to the biting of desert fleas, I would never have come to control an organization like the mining company. We defy the Canal Cities and their courts, as we defy the Martians of the desert. Both buy from us, because they have no choice. In a few years they will have less choice. They will buy water from us, too. Drop by drop, and pay for it with the ultimate wealth I can squeeze from them. Let them squabble among themselves, red against white, each blaming the other, lying, cheating, killing for a pittance of water. People like me always win. I like to fish in troubled waters. Occasionally, I even catch an attractive fish like you . . . "

An alarm bell rang, and the blinker signal flashed from the wall. Vorga gave sharp orders, and men jumped to his command.

"That means your friend, your lover, has fallen into the trap we set for him," he observed, enjoying her reactions. "All but the one elevator were set to lock controls, once they were used. Your white lover is now crushed at the top of the shaft. Or pinned like an insect in shattered wreckage at the bottom. Would you like to go with us, when we make sure of him? It might be a touching last farewell for you. If you promise to be very nice to me, I might even let you shoot him . . . if he isn't already dead."

Cilte paled. She cast about quickly in her mind, searching for any trick that might help her escape. There was no chance. If only for a moment she could divert Thol's blaster gun, she could whip open her bag and kill Vorga with the tiny weapon before any hand could stop her. The fools had not bothered to search for possible weapons. Opportunity might arise . . . if she could act a part well enough to convince Vorga.

Cilte smiled, using all the seductive arts she knew how to command. "I would *like* to kill Tolver," she said viciously. "For that

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privilege, I could even be . . . very nice to you."

"Bring her along," Vorga ordered Thol. "I'd like to see her face if Tolver isn't dead . . . and she has to kill him for me."

Thol's blaster prodded Cilte suggestively. "All right—but no tricks, sister. My trigger is nervous now."

"Watch her," cautioned Vorga. "She's quick as a cat, and I don't want her claws in me."

AT the elevator shaft an armed guard approached Vorga. "He's still above, somewhere. The car hasn't come down. From the noise up the shaft, I'd say he's dead."

Vorga nodded absently. "We'll go up and look. Stay here and see that no one gets through. No one." His eyes rested curiously on Cilte, but she gave no hint of emotions raging in her.

"You'll have to go on foot," said the guard. "All the lifts are still blocked out. Men are ready to put them in shape again as soon as you're sure of the Security Cop. Until then, we don't dare get them running properly. He might get past if the lifts were running. Nobody can, on foot. All the stairs are shut off."

"We don't mind the walk," Vorga said. "A little exercise is good for working off emotions. Besides, in a place like this, we move around too little for our own health."

Haldas led the way up stairs to the next level, Cilte next, with Thol's blaster still pressed against her back, then Thol and Vorga bringing up the rear. Level Nine platform showed no signs of damage. It was deserted, obviously empty.

Cautiously, the group worked up the stairs leading to Level Ten. Here the radilumes had faded through centuries of disuse. Light was dimmer, and hand radilumes were brought into use. The beams licked up the dark, winding alley of stairway.

Halfway between levels, Heldas' foot trod on a crumbling stone step which gave way completely under his weight. He lost balance, started to topple and clawed at Cilte to break his fall. Nimbly, she twisted aside, snapping open her purse. It was the chance she had prayed for. Spinning, she fired wildly, but not before Vorga had sensed her purpose. He thrust Thol into the line of fire. A shriek of agony turned into animal gurglings as the heat beam burned through Thol's writhing body. She fired again and again, too rapidly for careful aim. But already Vorga and Heldas were safely behind the curving rock of the stairwell.

Both clawed for Thol's blaster which rolled and rattled as it fell down the steps. Heldas' fingers were quicker, surer. In the darkness, the radilume beams beat a crazy pattern of light. One found Cilte's

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crouched form.

She moved, dodging. A blaster beam licked through the darkness. Clothing smoked, and a smell of scorching fur and cloth clung to her as she reached the shelter of curving walls. Her skin stung as if wasps had found every bare inch of it. But she avoided the worst concussion of the explosion.

A blast echoed thunderously in the confined space. Cilte was hurled face down on the steps. Flakes of stone showered around her. Like a frightened animal, she ascended on all fours, making what speed she could. Behind her was momentary confusion, then deadly silence. She could feel the men edging cautiously upward after her. Before the blast came, she knew they would fire again.

There came another flash, illuminating the curved wall more intensely than sunlight. Cilte was scarcely aware of sound, but a fist of solid air struck her from behind, hurling her sprawling.

SHE never remembered the last few steps to Level Ten. All of her reactions were purely animal. Instinct, volition, every nerve and muscle concentrated upon a single objective. Flight. Escape. Mindless, she clawed her way up the steps, onto a flat surface of tunnel or platform.

In total darkness, hysterically sobbing, she ran. And then suddenly, there was no floor under her feet. Just empty nothingness. Intuitively, she sensed the abyss. Too late, her feet beat vainly upon empty air.

Then an arm reached out of nowhere in the darkness and clasped her firmly around the waist. It held, and she stopped struggling to let the invisible support drag her to safety. The breath had gone out of her in the moment of falling. She yielded weakly and let herself go limp. The arm hauled her in and dumped her on the hard floor without ceremony. Then a hand clapped firmly over her mouth as she opened it to scream.

Tolver risked a flash of the radilume. Even braced as he was, with one arm looped around a projecting section of the tunnel wall, it was a miracle that the girl's rush had not carried both of them into the pit.

Panting, now voiceless, Cilte accepted the reality of capture. For a moment, Tolver thought she had fainted, but the tension of her muscles argued otherwise.

"Can you scream?" he asked, whispering. She nodded, and part of her answer was a shriek of agonized terror. Tolver stiffened at the ugly sound. "That may bring them up. I doubt it. Vorga is too careful of his precious skin to take chances."

"What happens now?" asked Cilte.

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No sound came from the stairhead. Apparently, Vorga and his henchman were taking no chances. The bait did not interest them.

Tolver shone the radilume briefly in Cilte's pale, starched face. "Are you afraid to die?" he asked casually.

"Is there no help for us? If not, I can die as bravely as you. But I would prefer other company."

"So would I," he told her bitterly. "There's not much to choose between you and your friends on the stairs. If they had come up, I could have killed them. Then we'd have a fighting chance to break through. This way——" He shrugged.

Cilte was silent; her thoughts far away.

Tolver pointed up the dark, continuing stairway leading to the inner levels and still more ancient workings. "We can go up," he said. "It will delay things a little. They'll barricade the stair down there. When help comes, they'll send up some expendables. I'd prefer not to be taken . . . alive."

Cilte looked up the stairwell. "How long can we last there—without food or water?"

A monotonous clanking came from below, followed by hissing and a curious metallic rustle. "Not long enough to worry about it. I think they're sealing off the caverns here. Then they'll turn on the pumps and evacuate the air in all these inner levels."

Cilte shivered with horror. "Can they do that? I thought the inner level caverns were part of the circulating system."

"They are," Tolver agreed. "But in case of an air-purifier breakdown, they can be sealed off, and the air pumped out for salvage. The air will last longer at the inmost levels. Shall we climb?"

OF that fearful ascent, or descent, Tolver could never afterward remember details. There were endless galleries and long dark corridors; there were stairways at first, then spiral runs, then nothing but the ancient workings. Now that he dared to use the radilume, the going was easier. But perils and the awful lonely darkness confronted them at every turn and twist of the echoing antique maze. There seemed no order or plan, no levels, just galleries deep with the dust of ages, wandering at the whims of whatever ancients, human or others, who had built them from the rotting surface of a solid mass of iron.

Later, he learned that there was a plan, and a very good one, but this staggering discovery was not something learned at once.

They passed even beyond the ancient workings and found their footsteps glancing in hollow sounds from walls deeply figured with reliefs that seemed as old as time.

Here the radilumes set in the roof seemed to have run out the

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time alloted for their brilliance. It was almost possible to calculate the antiquity of the cavern from the diminished light given by the radilumes—since these light-sources consist of a microscopic point of radioactive matter buried within a larger mass of substance which fluoresces coldly under the influence. The agent of radioactivity loses strength gradually, the peak of activity ranging upward to half a million years. Some of these were totally dark, others glimmered feebly.

A feeling of awe possessed Tolver's mind, and if the very atmosphere of extreme antiquity impressed him, how much more so was Cilte Thenobar under its influence! She moved after him in deep silence, caught in a net of profound reveries. The reliefs on the walls interested her strangely, invoking a phantom of racial memory.

"This corridor leads to a temple," she said. "Can you think of a better place to await death."

"A lot of them," Tolver said curtly. But he let her lead in the direction her fancy dictated. It would not matter very long in any case. The air was already noticably thinner. His head felt top-heavy and the drop in pressure made his eyes feel popped out; his ears rang, and the pressure of blood in his arteries was slowly becoming unsupportable. In a short time there would be hemorrhages from nose and ears, perhaps eyes, too. And then death would come quickly enough.

CILTE paused in an ornate doorway, carved of the red, dusty-surfaced rock which was so nearly pure iron, oxydizing slowly to powdery heaps. She made a sign, thought to be holy by the desert peoples of Mars.

They entered the temple. It had once been very beautiful—and even now, with much of its splendors rusted away, some phantom rags of beauty remained.

"In a temple such as this," said Cilte, "there will be thought records of the ancients' noblest thoughts."

"I'm in no mood for them," Tolver grumbled.

But he let Cilte attach the corroding electrodes of the old headset to his temples. She repeated the process with herself; then both lay back on the dust covered benches and relaxed.

Calm flowed over him in the ancient chapel. It was not a bad place to die. Not if one must die. He was conscious of the presence of Cilte, close beside him, of the brave light of the hand radilume between them, dispelling darkness. His hand reached out and met hers. She clasped his fingers gently, smiled. If only everything had been different——

The thoughts were coming now,

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sluggishly, moving like worms of squirming light in his brain. He resented their intrusion on his own thoughts and was moved to tear the headset from his reeling skull. But it would cause her pain . . .

It came in sharp spurting flashes of light. Clouds of rich, unfolding crimson parted and there was a splendor beyond human imagination. This, Tolver thought calmly, is—Death!

But it was not death. It was life, stronger than life. It was light, growing intolerably painful.

Rich, full of experience, the mind controlled him now; and in a fearful rush of awareness, a whole field of thought opened before him. In fractions of seconds, his mind burst with new knowledge, a world of specialized, technical power.

Enlightenment came. The flash was so powerful that he tore the headset from him and hurled it into a far corner. He ran to the wall, beating on it, screaming like a madman.

Cilte's eyes opened. She stared, still drugged by the effects of the thought filter.

"There is a way," Tolver screamed. "So simple I didn't even think of it. There is a chance, a chance for you and me, a chance for your people . . . "

DAZEDLY Cilte followed, stumbling as he dragged her from the temple. In mad haste they retraced their steps, plunging down the spiralling stairs in complete abandon. Down the dark galleries, without giving them a passing glance. Down, down, down, or up, up, up toward the surface.

"I was a fool," Tolver cried. "There is a way out, an escape, if we dare take it. And we must take it. In your thought record I learned the truth. Deimos is artificial, an artificial moon."

"You're crazy," Cilte charged, stopping for breath. "What difference does that make?"

"It's hollow," he shouted at her. "Don't you understand? The moon is hollow. It's full of water."

Cilte refused to budge. "No," she objected. "It's a dream. A mad, bright dream. The seismic tests prove otherwise. Deimos is solid iron, or nickel-iron, or rock so nearly like it that it registers as iron. No water could be so dense and rigid."

"It's not ordinary water," Tolver said, calming. He had to explain before Cilte would move. "It's water pressurized to the same density as iron, pressurized and condensed to a sixth of its normal bulk. It was all in the thought record, the whole story. I don't know how they did it, but the atoms were crushed together somehow. A shell of impervium protects the water, keeps it under pressure. Once that pressure is released, the water will resume its bulk, and its other natural pro-

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perties. It's the most priceless treasure anyone could give Mars — water! Your legacy from the ancients of your own race. Don't argue, run! We need all our strength to get out and take word of this to Mars. To your people. I've thought of a way that will take a lot of doing, but we may make it. I'll explain later."

Cilte was gasping and crying at the same time when they reached Level Twelve. Tolver stopped, wet a finger and held it up to determine the direction of flow in the currents of thinning air. His head was throbbing, about to explode. Blood trickled in a thin stream from one nostril. Minutes counted. Seconds.

He dragged Cilte in the direction the current indicated. Somewhere ahead thumped machinery.

The gigantic bulks of a pumping station loomed out of the dimness ahead. He strode swiftly to the cylinders, used his heat gun to melt off locks and opened a door in the side of the housing. Inside, a monstrous piston moved in smooth, vibrating cycles, pounding out a steady, metallic beat. He studied the cycle a moment, calculating.

"Into the tube," he instructed Cilte, who lay half-fainting against his arm. "Watch the timing. It will be a nightmare, but it won't last long. We'll go into the air tubes like corks from a bottle. They'll spew us out into the levels near the surface, probably the city-levels. From there, we'll have to shoot our way to the landing stages and steal a space ship or a lifeboat space sled. Watch your timing."

The warning was wasted. Cilte's eyes glazed, she slumped against him. Swearing, Tolver counted the swing of the piston, jerked open a lid into darkness, swung Cilte through and closed the vent against a screaming gout of pressured air.

He waited the next cycle, counted, jerked open the valve vent, and dived into darkness.

Space closed in. Roaring darkness. Air crushed him from all sides. He seemed to explode inwardly. He realized how a swatted insect feels. Light burst through his aching eyes.

HE was in one of the great ventilator openings, flattened against the filter screen. Beside him was Cilte, breath squeezed from her body. She gasped painfully for air, and wriggled like a wounded snake, arms and legs threshing.

He fought to her side, burned a great hole in the filter screen and a blast of air hurled them onto a platform.

Tolver lay numbly for moments, then struggled to his feet.

It was the same platform, the same attendant still swept at the non-existent dust. He stared at Tolver, opened his mouth and stood

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speechless. Then he struck wildly at Tolver with the broom. Tolver shot him with the heat gun. The man writhed and kicked. A smell of charred flesh filled the air.

Cilte was moving, trying weakly to rise. Tolver helped her to the tube platform, selected a robo-car and loaded her in. The car whined down the incline, caught the wall magnets in the tube. As the car raced, clicking, through the darkness, Tolver talked.

"Have your people spaceships large enough?' he asked.

"Just battle cruisers," Cilte replied. "None to carry such a cargo."

"Not carry," Tolver said grimly. "How are your mathematicians?"

"Our theoretical scientists are the best in the solar system," the girl said proudly.

"We'll find that out," Tolver promised. "Give them a real problem to work out. How to move a moon?"

"You're insane!" Cilte exclaimed tragically, but wild hope dawned in her face. "No one could do such a thing. A mass of the density of meteoric iron, an object of such size and weight. If it crashed on Mars, it could destroy half the planet. At 3:1 miles per second, it would have no tensile strength, or as much as solid rock. It would be sheer destruction, even if it were possible. It might pierce through the solid crust and release the oceans of magma, or burst the planet like a crushed fruit. You can't do it——"

"Perhaps. But it needn't crash in its present form. Before it crashes, we could burn through the outer layers, break open the impervium. Heat rays could take care of the outer part; atomic cannon, the impervium shell. It may shatter of its own stresses when it gets close enough to Mars for a powerful enough gravitational pull. That way, most of it would fall as rain or snow. If the area were uninhabited, what matter. A few thousand tons of meteorites could do as much damage. Even a few large blocks of ice would not make too much trouble, in an old sea-bottom."

"I'll take it up with the council of Red Martians," Cilte said, keeping her voice even. "At least I am grateful for your thought. . . ."

A station signalled. Tolver cut the magnetic linkage. The car slowed, ran up a ramp, stopped. A long, sleek cruiser was warped to the landing stages. No plastic gangplank bridged the gulf between stage and ship. Tolver leaped while Cilte swept a deadly barrage of heatbeams to hold off any assault.

The airlock door was closing. Tolver crashed a shoulder into the closing wedge, heaved with all his strength. He was through, but he felt bone give in his arm and shoulder. Beams of flickering, jagged heat

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laced the control room. Shadows staggered. The confined space was a tumult of raging sound. Blast followed hot blast. The pilot sagged in his swivelled seat. Two other crewmen lay in seared heaps. Tolver felt blisters rising from his raw skin where a beam had touched a glancing blow. The cabin was a furnace.

Tolver clawed his way to the controls, slammed open the airlock door. Cilte crouched beside him, helping him work the controls. Fearful energies raged from the stern jets and the cruiser jerked from its cradle. Like a fireworks display, it screamed up the ramps into the tube to the surface; in seconds it was at the outer airlock.

Cilte was at the guns, spraying the platforms with incandescence. Figures melted away like wind-flicked leaves.

The outer valve was closed. Tolver jammed the cruiser's nose against it, forcing the throttles wide open. Cilte turned the heat guns full on the doors. Everything happened at once. Doors melted, fused, blew. On the heels of a shrieking gale of outrushing air, the cruiser left the lock like a bullet from a gun, and Deimos dropped astern.

SLOWLY, majestically, like a queen urged to suicide, Deimos moved against a vault of darkness gemmed by hard, bright stars. It moved in a long, slow spiral calculated to end above an old sea bottom of distant Mars, which loomed like a monstrous living jewel of light far below.

Clustering the bulk of Deimos, like gnats worrying the flanks of an elephant, were the great space-cruisers of the Red Martian battle fleet. Long cables with magnetic grapples linked the huge globe and the powerful ships. It was a mad dream, but not as spectacular as Tolver had expected. It was a slow, grueling process, as the gnats teased the elephant out of stride, gnawing gradually at the orbital velocity, eating away at the kinetic energy of a moon's inertial motion, letting the gravity of Mars take hold to swing the bulk of Deimos ever closer.

By infinitesimal degrees, velocity yielded and the globular island of space slowed its careening flight. Hour after hour, day after day, the ships worked in relays. Ever and ever closer to Mars, edged the whirling moon . . .

Weeks had passed since Tolver and Cilte had escaped from the dark caverns of Deimos and set their course for the red deserts where her people lived in tents or in the dying underground cities. On the fifth day following that escape, the battle fleet of the Red Martians had appeared in force off Deimos, with an ultimatum not to be denied. Evacuate at once, or the sur-

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face would be riddled with heat beams and atomic bombardment, the air cells destroyed, the gravity generators melted down and vaporized, all life made impossible. In sullen anger, vowing vengeance, the myrmidons of the mining syndicate had departed Marsward. By ore-freighter, by life-boat, by luxury cruiser, they had departed and vanished utterly. The great work had begun.

Interference expected from the government of the Canal Cities did not materialize. The Cities were having grave troubles of their own, and were not interested in the complaints of the mining syndicate, itself outlawed. All pumping stations had broken down completely. Water shortage was acute. Riots assumed the aspect and proportions of civil war, in which all facilities of the Navy and the Security Police were deeply involved. Restoring a semblance of order was too great a task to permit outside interests, however grave. But the moon-juggling had not gone unobserved.

The Space Patrol had been sent for. Squadrons dispatched from Venus, Luna, Callisto and Ganymede were known to have set forth. Somewhere in the dark gulfs of space, they were converging on Mars. Eventually, the matter would have to be threshed out in the courts, if not in open warfare. In the meantime, Tolver and his Martian allies worked feverishly. Better to present the assembled solar worlds with an accomplished fact, rather than a disturbing project that might be deadly dangerous. Before the SP squadrons could possibly arrive, time must pass. It might be time enough.

JED Tolver no longer carried the sole responsibility for the outrage. In full council, the Red Martian League had decided to try his wild scheme. The "Best Scientists in the Solar System" had thought it very plausible, even practicable and had advised in favor of it. Aided by batteries of electric brains, they now made endless calculations of stress, of velocity, of power, of the distance involved, of gravity and its inverse squares. Ala Borin had made his reputation by some mathematical acrobatics, placing the orbit of the nearer moon, the most favorable times for passing that orbit with the kidnaped Deimos, and how best to maneuver the titan down close enough for gravity to make sure of its precious cargo.

Records had even been found, at such a late date, accounting for Deimos as a tremendous storehouse for the most precious and rarest commodity on Mars—water. Long, long ago, when water and atmosphere were both plentiful on Mars, her noblest and most far-sighted engineers had foreseen the coming

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shortages. Conceived in vision and executed in genius, the best engineers of the planet had labored years, under fearful difficulties, to construct a huge storage vault; assembled it in space piece by piece, because of the impossibility of raising so vast a bulk; anchored it firmly by computing orbit, essential velocity to maintain such orbit at the fifteen thousand mile distance, and consigned it as legacy to the future. The problems involved had been staggering; even the calculations necessary to a balance of orbital velocity and the gravity of the planet made the brain reel.

With Ala Borin, Jed Tolver stood in the observation cabin of the flagship, watching while the moon was guided subtly into the most crucial danger zone of its fall. More than half the descent had already been safely managed, but the worst was almost at hand. The outer moon was approaching the orbit of racing Phobos, nearer of the two moons. Much larger than Deimos, the nearer moon moved at terrific speed in its smaller orbit.

"IS there a chance to avoid collision?" Tolver asked wearily. The long hours of steady work, patient waiting, constant worry had taken savage toll of both strength and confidence.

Ala Borin, the scientist, smiled grimly. "If my calculations are correct, a very good chance. It is a matter of timing."

"The timing may be right," objected Tolver, "but our ships may not be powerful enough to maintain control of Deimos."

"That is possible," Borin admitted calmly. "We have tried to be exact in calculating available power, the various elements to be guarded against, everything one can imagine. But there is always the element of chance . . . and human fallibility. We do our best. The rest is up to the gods."

Fatalism was not part of Tolver's nature. He frowned angrily.

"Imagine what success will mean to us," comforted Borin. "If we succeed Mars will have water for generations, perhaps as long as we need water. Assume a flat-bottomed tank, eighty earth-miles to each side of a gigantic square, 6400 square miles. If ordinary water, the stored treasure of Deimos would fill this tank to a depth of ten feet. If compressed to the approximate density of iron, we can figure six times as great a volume; roughly a depth of sixty feet over such an area.

"With us, no water is wasted. Even the walls and floor of our underground cities are lined with non-rusting metal or plastic, and every drop of water used is reclaimed and re-used. Even the vapor of our breathing is captured eventually, to be re-condensed at

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the filter locks. Small amounts escape as people come and go, but the incoming traffic balances the outgoing loss. We Red Martians are a thrifty people, of necessity."

Ala Borin was a scientist but also a man. Observing the strain Tolver had been under he said kindly:

"Forget the figures. Responsibility is ours now; not yours. Go back to your ship. Soon, now, it will be over. We are great gamblers, we Red Martians. We thank you for the greatest gamble of our race and period."

Tolver shrugged. A life-boat took him back to his ship. He had been assigned command of a destroyer, one of the screen thrown out to protect the working cruisers from possible attack. It was not believed that Vorga, or his syndicate, would give up so easily.

ON the destroyer X-304, Cilte Thenobar was waiting for him. Against his protest, she had insisted upon coming along. It was, she claimed, their project.

"Why don't you get some sleep?" she begged. "You can't stand much more of this. It's bigger than a one-man job."

"Much bigger," Tolver agreed, smiling sadly. Who could sleep with the crucial moment at hand? He said nothing of his fears. Instead: "I think Vorga knew about the water in Deimos," he guessed aloud. "I think he was planning something for it."

"He was planning something, but I don't know what it was," Cilte said. "It might have been this, or something else."

Alarms shrilled suddenly. "Battle stations!"

Tolver jumped to the scanners, signalled the other destroyers of the protective screen. Proximity alarms had detected the close approach of alien mass. There had been several false alarms caused by drifting meteoric material but this was the real thing.

Out of the sun swooped a savage attack. Fast, slender, dark-hulled ships whirled in close, heat rays lancing out. Atomic projectiles traced thin lines across darkness, mushrooms of soundless light flamed in space. Straight into the cluster of cruisers near Deimos went a powered magnetic torpedo. One giant cruiser vanished into a silent flash.

A second torpedo was spotted, its range calculated, and a destroyer made a gallant, spectacular sacrifice.

At Deimos, the cruisers forsook the tasks for which their laboring motors had never been intended. They cut the cables, broke ranks and scattered. Deimos drifted free, to find and choose a path for herself.

Three times the raiders of the outlawed mining syndicate raced in

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for the kill, attacking savagely. Three times, they were sent scurrying back. The great war-cruisers were bringing armament to bear which outclassed the outlaw attackers.

A fourth time the attack drove home. Another giant cruiser disappeared into a terrific flash of violence, but the losses of the raiders were fearful. Ship after ship exploded as beams cut them in two, or atomic projectiles raked their slim hulls. After a desperate melee, they were repulsed. Too few remained to make another attack, and in confusion and fear they lost themselves in speed and space.

Back to the moon raced the cruisers. Out flashed the cables and magnetic grapples took hold once more. Deimos was moving swiftly now, too swiftly. Its accumulated velocity as gravity pulled it closer to the planet gave it almost enough speed for taking up a new, smaller orbit closer in. The gnats busied themselves at the attempt to slow down an elephant sliding downhill.

THE interruption had been deadly. Ala Borin finished his new calculations, paled under his bronze skin. He ran to the control room, barking orders.

Throughout the fleet, general alarms shrilled. "Collision Stations!"

Tolver jumped to his scanners, then stopped. They were not needed. A blot of light appeared, moving swiftly. Even mental calculation made the catastrophe obvious. Phobos, the nearer moon, of twice Deimos' diameter, was making its wild orbital dash. Deimos would intercept that invisible path at almost the exact instant Phobos reached it . . .

Hell broke loose in the fleet. Signals and countersignals splattered between ships.

It was hopeless. The order came from the flagship. "Abandon vicinity. Full power."

Project Moon had failed!

Final collision came at 23:10, Mars Time. Before that, Tolver snapped on the visiplate in the control cabin of the destroyer.

Cilte was crying. "You don't know what this meant to us," she moaned, face haggard with acceleration sickness; "how much we hoped and labored and prayed. It was the difference between life and death."

Streams of cosmic debris torn from opposing surfaces screened the actual moment of contact from observers. Drawn by their mutual attraction, the moons ground together, rebounded apart, strewing space with trails of fiery wreckage. Held together by invisible chains, they whirled in a devil's dance through space. Some velocity had been braked by the initial contact, such as it was. More was lost in the great catherine-wheel, while the

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moons revolved in fireworks display and gravitational and magnetic strains built-up between them. Like partners in some awful pair-dance, they bowed to each other. They rushed together——

It was spectacular beyond belief. Immense soundless flashes billowed through the sky, blanketing an entire quarter of nearer space, dispelling darkness. Then a spreading blinding ocean of light. From the explosion center, clouds of luminous vapor expanded under intense pressures of heat and light. Incandescent, brilliant, terrifying.

Solid darkness followed the intensity of light. Darkness which faded slowly as paralyzed eyes resumed their natural functions.

Harshly luminous in direct sunlight and reflected Mars-light, hung a gigantic curtain of frozen, condensing mist. Perhaps Phobos, too, had been a mighty storehouse of atmosphere or water. The cloud was titantic, a silvery, gleaming shroud woven of ice-particles, frozen gas, suddenly condensed microscopic matter. It was a shroud for the dead hopes of Mars.

Like a majestic ship of space, the glowing red-orange globe of Mars swept onward along its orbit, serenely unaware of its riven moons. It moved . . . directly into the cloud which blocked its path. Enveloped, obscured, the planet lost itself in dazzling-white mist which spread like thick cream to cover the entire surface, pole to pole. The red world became as glaring white as queenly Venus.

Cloud and planet moved on together . . .

FOR the first time in generations, it was snowing on Mars. It snowed hard, not over the polar cap alone, but over all of Mars. It had snowed steadily for weeks; snowed, rained, hailed, and for long hours at a time, there fell a rich precipitation of fine mud. The whole surface was mired or drifted. Water soaked into thirsty ground. Snow blanketed the lowlands, the flattened hills, the red plains of desert, the empty hollows of ancient sea-beds. Canals ran high, inundating banks. There were even small lakes and shallow oceans. Storage tanks and hastily-built deep reservoirs overflowed. Great transparent domes of the Canal Cities were coated with layers of thick ice, melting and trickling down in joyous uproar.

Scientists probed for facts behind the miracle; they toyed with masses of figures and the electronic brains grew weary of calculations to determine cause and effect. The inner moon, also, had proved a treasure house. While some of the compressed and stored water and atmosphere had been lost forever into the emptiness of space, most of the contents had clung to the mother planet.

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In convulsions of joy following the miracle, both Red and White Martians had forgotten old feuds. A solemn pact had been entered into, binding both to careful usage, and to a fair, friendly sharing of the planet's resources.

* * *

On a high terrace in Canal City III, Tolver and Cilte stood and gazed out upon a broad vista of ancient canal, now running full as life runs full in the young. Beyond the canal, hydroponic gardens were green and luxuriant again, and rioting over slopes which would not soon again be as barren as they had been for a thousand millenia.

Tears sparkled on Cilte's red-skinned cheeks, but these were from an overflow of happiness. She gazed fondly at her white-skinned husband.

"Deimos is gone," she said, "there is no longer a 'Gray Moon of Death'—but it will make a fine legend to tell the children . . . "

"On Earth," he said, "babies are usually pink when they are born."

She looked at him, puzzled. "Why do you think of that now?"

He grinned. "Ours will be pink too—but they'll stay that way—a new race to drink Mars' new water!"

HUMANKIND PAYS ITS DEBT TO THE ANIMAL WORLD

Legend tells us that it was a wolf that suckled the founders of Rome. There are many examples of animals suckling humans and saving their lives. But now, at last, the debt has been paid, to a small extent! And by a very tiny woman at that, a pygmy mother near Livingstone, Northern Rhodesia.

A safari under Major Gustav Teitge had killed a female leopard which a Kalahari pygmy guide said had just recently whelped. A search revealed the cubs—being nursed by a pygmy woman!

The woman had found the cubs, and being the only nursing mother in the village, had taken pity upon them and nursed them. Struck by her extraordinary kindness, the safari members paid her $2.80 and took the cubs to Livingstone, where they were weaned on dried milk.

The pygmy woman belonged to a nomadic tribe whose members are much smaller than the other natives of South Africa. The average height of the female members of the tribe was four feet. The tribe is quite primitive, wearing clothes made from the skins of animals and ornamented with beads.

This is the first instance of carnivorous animals being fed by a human mother, says the Natural History Museum in London.

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TROUBADOR

His primitive music was a threat to civilization's perfection. He could not be granted immortality! No jury would disagree.

By Mack Reynolds

In the silence of the courtroom, his voice formed the words of a long-forgotten ditty, "Jimmy Crack Corn . . ."

"WHAT is your name, please?"

Willie actually had to think for an instant. It had been so long since he'd used it, or heard it used. "William Dennison, 14K-49R-3rd."

"I understand you have a pseudonym, er . . . nickname. Please tell the court what it is."

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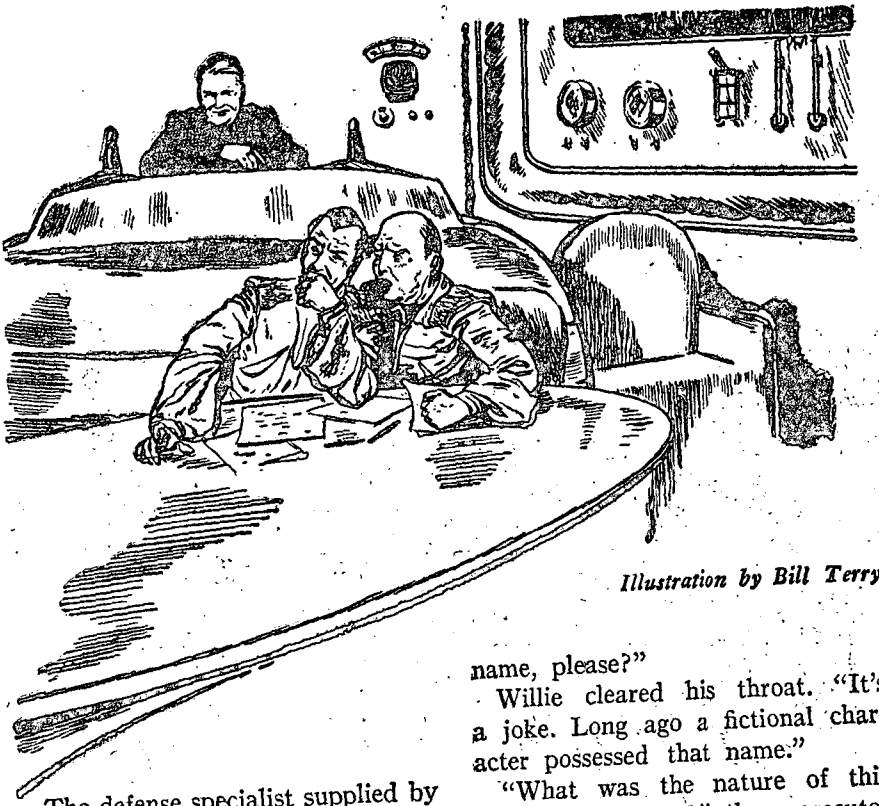

Illustration by Bill Terry

The defense specialist supplied by the Solar System League for Civil Rights raised his head as though to protest, but then said nothing.

Willie answered so softly that the video-technician had to ask him to raise his voice. "Willie," he repeated.

"Is it Weary Willie?"

"Willie said, "Sometimes; usually just Willie."

The presidor allowed himself a smile, to the prosecutor's satisfaction. Possibly this was going to be easier than he'd thought. "Would you explain the significance of the name, please?"

Willie cleared his throat. "It's a joke. Long ago a fictional character possessed that name."

"What was the nature of this fictional character?" the prosecutor pursued.

"He was a wanderer . . . a vagabond."

"A vagrant?"

Willie didn't answer.

"Is it true," the prosecutor smiled tolerantly, "Weary Willie, that you are also called the last of the hobos?"

Willie stirred uneasily, he was unable to make himself comfortable in the witness chair. He said, "I've prefered the title, last of the troubadours."

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The prosecutor remembered and softened his scowl. "I'm sure you do," he said, "but we'll come to that later. Is it true you are more often called the last of the hobos?"

"I . . . I suppose so."

"Please describe to the court the meaning of the word hobo."

Willie hesitated.

Turning to the presidor's bench, the prosecutor said, "With your permission, I'll read this extract from the *Grosset Glossary of Ancient Colloquialisms*. Under the heading *hobo*: United States, circa 1875 A.D. - 1975 A.D., A vagrant; a migrant worker of the lowest class; sometimes a petty criminal. The hobo was the 20th Century equivalent of the gypsy, using the railroads and the highways to replace the caravans of the latter."

The prosecutor asked his next question. "Do you think the estate of hobo is an honorable one, Weary Willie?"

The defense specialist made a wry face and said, "I demur."

The presidor motioned to the video technician. The vote of the audience-jury was taken and the panel above the presidor's bench flashed red indicating the question was to be answered.

Willie said, "Yes. I think . . . "

The prosecutor held up a hand and beamed at him. "Never mind, please. You have answered my question. Now then, you said earlier that you would prefer to be named the last of the troubadours. Explain that."

Willie stirred again, he still couldn't find comfort in his chair. "The troubadour was an ancient musician who wandered about the countryside entertaining people with his songs, usually his own compositions."

The prosecutor snapped, "Then you claim to be a musician?"

Willie hesitated, "In a manner of speaking."

"What musical universities did you attend?"

Softly, "None."

"Then of just what does your musical specialization consist?"

"I play a guitar and sing, sometimes my own compositions, sometimes ancient folk music." For the first time there was an edge of defiance in Willie's tone.

The prosecutor smiled tolerantly. "My dear Weary Willie," he said, "surely you are aware of the fact that we have equipment far superior to man in creating music. For half a millenium the human voice hasn't been used for vocalization; for thrice that time instruments have been played by efficient machines; for a thousand years composition has been done by mathematical formula. You say that you compose your own music. Didn't you know that musical composition technicians are divided into forty-seven divisions, each with their own score or so of sub-specializations?"

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"Forty-nine," the presidor interjected needlessly.

The prosecutor thanked him. Actually, he'd known it was the higher number but he knew the correction would amplify his point.

Willie said, "I compose a different type of music."

The prosecutor beamed at him. "I'm sure you do," he said, "however, the authorities on musical science don't consider your efforts as exactly coming under that category. But to get back to the question, Weary Willie, just what is your profession?"

"I am a troubadour," Willie said stubbornly. His mind went back to Kraus . . .

HE had met the old man—old in the former sense of the word—surprisingly enough, on one of his few incursions into the larger population centers. He was one of the few persons Willie ever met who refused the rejuvenation process needed every half century to insure immortality. The old man never explained why and it was possibly three hundred years after his death before Willie knew.

Kraus was the last man in the system to practice handicrafts, specializing in musical instruments that for centuries had been discarded in favor of the more practical, ultra efficient, ultra varied machine played devices of the new civilization. Most of his products went to museums. Few were ever utilized.

He taught Willie the guitar and when he had no more to teach, sent him to the other side of Terra where there existed an obscure musical museum containing the last wire recordings of ancient folk music.

It was through Kraus and through those recordings that Willie found himself. Through them he became, in his own mind, the last of the troubadours . . .

The prosecutor was saying, "Weary Willie, do you believe in the destiny of the human race?"

He brought his thoughts back to the present, but the sense of the question eluded him. The prosecutor said again, "Do you believe that man is destined to develop, expand, to one day dominate the universe?"

Willie shifted his position uncomfortably. It wasn't the way he would express it, but he said, "Yes."

There was more triumph than kindliness in the prosecutor's smile now. "Do you believe that to accomplish this the misfits of society must be eliminated?"

The defense specialist said, "I demur. I can see no connection with the purpose of the trial."

The presidor motioned impatiently to the video technician who put the question to a vote. Throughout the system, the audience-jury considered, then pressed the suitable key. The majority found for the prosecution and the panel

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flashed red.

Willie asked cautiously, "What do you mean by misfit and what by eliminated?"

The presidor said, "The question is quite clear. Answer it."

Willie twisted in his chair. "I . . . I suppose . . . yes, but I would . . . "

"The prosecution retires," said the prosecutor, beaming at the defense specialist from the Solar System League for Civil Rights.

THE defense specialist arose and approached Willie. He was far more perturbed than he had been at the beginning of the trial.

He began, "The degree of true democracy to be found in any social system in any age is to be measured by the extent to which it protects its minorities. No matter how small, that minority which is . . . "

The presidor shook his head impatiently. "The defense will remember that a summation period follows." He allowed himself a slight smile. "Even slogans of the League for Civil Rights can wait until that time. Please examine the respondent."

The defense specialist took a deep breath and asked Willie, "Do you consider yourself a misfit in society?"

Willie straightened in his chair and said firmly, "No."

"You call yourself a troubadour but the prosecutor has pointed out that there is no such specialization in musical science. Please tell us why you disagree with either the prosecutor or the present heads of musical art."

This was better. Willie began, "I believe that the soul has gone out of music, and not only music but of all society. I believe that if we are to . . . ."

"I demur," interrupted the prosecutor. "An attack upon musical science by an admittedly unschooled person is obviously beside the point."

The presidor said, "Take the vote, please."

The panel turned green.

The defense specialist tried to reword it. "Please tell the court why you believe yourself suitable for rejuvenation."

The presidor raised a protesting hand. "You have already been warned that such material belongs in your summation period."

The defense specialist's lips thinned and whitened. He said, a tone of desperation in his voice, "William Dennison, it has been pointed out that you are sometimes known as the last of the hobos and the term hobo is defined partially as a sometimes petty criminal. Have you ever committed a crime of any type?"

Willie stirred. "Of course not."

"Of what have your activities consisted in your approximate eight hundred years of life?"

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Willie smiled, "Of trying to bring a little music into the hearts of . . ."

The prosecutor rapped, "I demur. Never before in the history of the race has there been more universal recourse to the best music produced by musical science. There is no need in society for vagrants playing before tiny audiences; video is available to all."

The panel flashed green when the question was put.

The defense specialist stood silent for a long moment. His eyes flashed from prosecutor to presidor, then to the video panel. Twice he began to speak, but restrained himself.

The presidor asked, "Does the respondent's defense specialist have further questions?"

The League for Civil Rights man turned to Willie and said, "Do you have anything else to say, short of our five minute summation?"

IT had slowly come to Willie why he was in revolt against things as they were. It finally became clear and he knew why Kraus, the old man who had so carefully made his ancient instruments of music by hand, had refused renewal of life.

Man was becoming stratified, stereotyped. He had solved his problems of the production and distribution of an abundance of the necessities and even the luxuries of life. He had built himself a social system that guaranteed the freedom for which he had so long striven. In short, man had reached what had always been thought the millennium —Utopia!

And then the question—never really expressed, of course, but there —arose, "Where do we go from here?"

Nobody answered.

Hundreds of thousands of years before, an early man-form had used a stone or a piece of wood to knock some fruit from a tree. That had started the progress of the tool, and man's attempt to free himself from the tyranny of nature. For countless centuries he improved his tools until finally they became machines, and super-machines, and ultra-super-machines. And as they developed man had to change his ways to fit his new environment.

Nature was conquered, but somewhere along the line man had become a slave to the machines he had created to free himself from nature's oppression. Progress continued and with it came the ultra-specialization of Willie's time.

"We are becoming like ants, like bees," was the way Willie put it.

Of course his efforts were less than a tiny meteorite flashing in the endless blackness of space; but he fought on. Here and there he found a convert, a kindred spirit, another who fought against man's trend to the anthill. There hadn't been many; for one thing he was kept from reaching the masses of

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mankind by his lack of a means of spreading his philosophy other than by word of mouth . . .

The presidor was saying, "The prosecutor will address his summation to the audience-jury."

The prosecutor spoke easily. The trial had gone even better than he had hoped. His sponsors of the Eugenics Society and the Association for Development of the ace would be pleased.

"I shall not need my full five minutes," he said. "The case is a simple one. Weary Willie," he smiled when he used the nickname, "has proven by his testimony to be a misfit, a throwback, an atavism. His presence amidst mankind is unfortunate. Possible offspring could well inherit his tendencies; those who come in contact with him might well be, er . . . corrupted.

"We do not claim that Weary Willie is a criminal, certainly not in the ordinary sense of the word, since crime has for all practical purposes been eliminated. We do claim, however, that he ih a public enemy.

"Obviously, we do not ask punishment, the world has progressed beyond the point where its misfits are punished as they were in ancient times. We do ask, however, that society protect itself. The protective device is an obvious one; the prosecution demands that Weary Willie not be granted rejuvenation, and that his life end when it has run its natural course.

"I would also like to point out that this case has drawn interplanetary interest due to the fact that the decision here will set a precedent for future cases of this category. The question the audience-jury will vote upon today is not just whether or not William Dennison, 14K49R-3rd, or Weary Willie, shall be refused further rejuvenation but whether man will protect himself from the atavists who would destroy, were they able, man's progress."

THE prosecutor resumed his seat and congratulated himself inwardly. He thought it had gone very well.

The presidor nodded approvingly and said. "The respondent's defense specialist will address his summation to the audience-jury."

The defense specialist cleared his throat. "Against my advice, the respondent has decided to make his own summation."

The presidor nodded and said, "That is unusual, but permissible."

Willie asked, "May I have my guitar?"

It was brought from the corridor outside, where his other few possessions were also awaiting him.

He cleared his throat and looked into the video device and tried a wry grin. He said shyly, "I've always wanted a larger audience than I've ever had as a . . . a trouba-

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dour."

As he went on he unconsciously stroked the dark wood of the ancient instrument, as a man would caress something he loved deeply. "It seems to me that everything hinges upon whether or not the troubadours in life are necessary to man's progress. I think they are."

He ran a gentle finger over the strings of his guitar. "I'm going to play and sing. The prosecutor said that because I failed to study musical science in some gigantic musical university and to learn a specialization in the art, I cannot make music. I guess it's up to you to decide. This song is not one of my own, but one of those simple tunes that was sung long, long ago — when man still had a soul and a love of real music which came from the heart, not from mechanical instruments played by robots. It's called *'Blue Tail Fly.'*"

His fingers began to strum and he sang softly, shyly:

When I was young I used to wait,
On my master and serve him his plate,
And pass the bottle when he got dry,
And brush away the blue tailed fly.
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
My master's gone away.
One day we rode around the farm,
The flies so numerous they did swarm.
One bit the pony in the thigh
The devil take the blue tail fly.
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
Jimmy Crack Corn and I don't care,
My master's gone away.
The pony run, he jump, he pitch,
He throw my master in the ditch,
He died, the jury wondered why,
The verdict was, the blue tail fly.
Jimmy Crack . . ."

The prosecutor came to his feet hotly. "I demur. The respondent is mocking the court. Instead of allowing his council to present what little defense possible, he makes a spectacle of himself and . . . "

The presidor scowled. "The prosecutor will please refrain from interruption while the respondent is utilizing his summation period in the manner he thinks best."

The other flushed. "I demur."

The presidor's scowl deepened but he motioned to the video-tech-

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nician who put the question to the vote. The panel went red.

The presidor said, "The prosecution will refrain from further interruption of the respondent's summation."

But Willie shook his head. "No." he said. "He's right; it was ridiculous. I suppose I have too much of what they used to call the *ham* in me. I couldn't resist the opportunity of having such a large audience. Undoubtedly, it will give them the chance to decide even more easily that I am what the prosecutor has said, a misfit." He took up his guitar and began to return to his chair.

The prosecutor said with satisfaction, "I call for the decision of the audience-jury."

A muscle worked in the cheek of the presidor, but he raised his hand in signal and the video-technician touched switches and buttons.

The panel flashed green.

PRESIDOR, and prosecutor, defense specialist and respondent, and even the video-technician, stared at it unbelievingly.

The prosecutor was on his feet again. "I demand an actual count," he sputtered. "The video equipment is obviously out of order. There is . . ."

The presidor silenced him with a glare, but turned to the video man. "A count," he requested.

More switches and other buttons. The figures flashed on the panel. Acquittal—12,654,302,917; Guilty—235,104.

The prosecutor's eyes bugged out in disbelief. He sputtered, "That's fantastic, obviously those figures mean that the video-computor is in error."

The defense specialist smiled broadly at him. "To the contrary, it means that over 200,000 members of the audience-jury must be tone deaf. Also that for the first time in centuries man has heard music." The defense specialist realized that this moment was historical and that he was playing a major part in it. He added, somewhat ostentatiously, "Possibly man is taking his first step toward regaining his soul."

Willie's grin matched that of his defense specialist—and, to his surprise, that of the presidor and the video-technician. He ran his fingers over the guitar strings. "Maybe they'd like to hear the rest of *Blue Tail Fly*," said the last of the old troubadours, the first of the new.

THE END

COMING NEXT ISSUE

"EYE OF THE TEMPTRESS"

By RAY PALMER

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LETTERS

Paul L. Ross

Although I've been reading STF for the past ten or twelve years I'm afraid that I have been a rather inactive fan. In fact I can recall writing only one other letter to a magazine in all that time. Unfortunately the leitmotive for both compositions is identical. Disgust with Edwin Sigler. Since you received only this one dissenting reply to Bradbury's "Way in the Middle of the Air" I imagine that you felt obligated to print it. I admire the restrained comment you gave us on it. It's so easy for normal people to wax hysterical when discussing such filth.

About two years ago this same Sigler, through an excuse which I've long forgotten, turned the letter section of Planet Stories into a soap box for several issues. He was able to accomplish this because the editors published a cross section of the many answers they received to his original propaganda. Of course he answered the critics, expanding his original remarks in the process. Then they jumped him again and we were right back where we started. This continued until everybody was thoroughly nauseated.

Which brings me to my point. He is obviously looking for another excuse to keep his name in print for a time, thus obtaining a reflected importance which he could never achieve in the normal course of his life. I see no reason to allow him this chance for self-dramatization. Therefore, if possible, please do not print any of the many replies which he will probably draw. Just list the number of entries in at press time and thank those who bothered to write. You are publishing two pretty good magazines which look as though they may become quite good. Why louse up the letter sections with his tripe?

104 Van Buren St,
Newark, N. J.

We've received so many replies to Mr. Sigler's letter that in order to print them all we would have to devote the entire Letters column for the next three or four issues to the project. This being inadvisable, we'll merely say that Mr. Sigler was over-ruled by a landslide of letters, and proceed to other topics.—Ed.

Ron H. Greves

Wonder if you could help me, through the columns of OW, to trace a chap who has been sending me mags from the Los Angeles area of California.

You see, I don't have his address or anything but his initials, as he sometimes writes inside a mag, "Good reading R. H. G., from H. A. B." I'd like to be able to write him and to send him some British stf in return.

Also, I would like any fellow I've had letters or mags from but who has not heard from me in return, or to whom I have promised copies of the English NEW WORLDS but not delivered the goods to contact me again. You see, I've been snowed under with U.S. mail, and gotten myself a little confused.

I think your mag is good. I have received all issues except No. 1 through the good offices of U.S. fen (and femme fen too!) In my opinion, its ranks second on the list of U.S. prozines; and I'm not gonna tell you who the other is, but I reckon you'll know! If you'd stop putting fantasy in (especially Shaver) it would rank right alongside! There, now I've stuck my neck out. Wait while I put on my helmet afore you take a swipe at battin'

(*Continued on page* 101)

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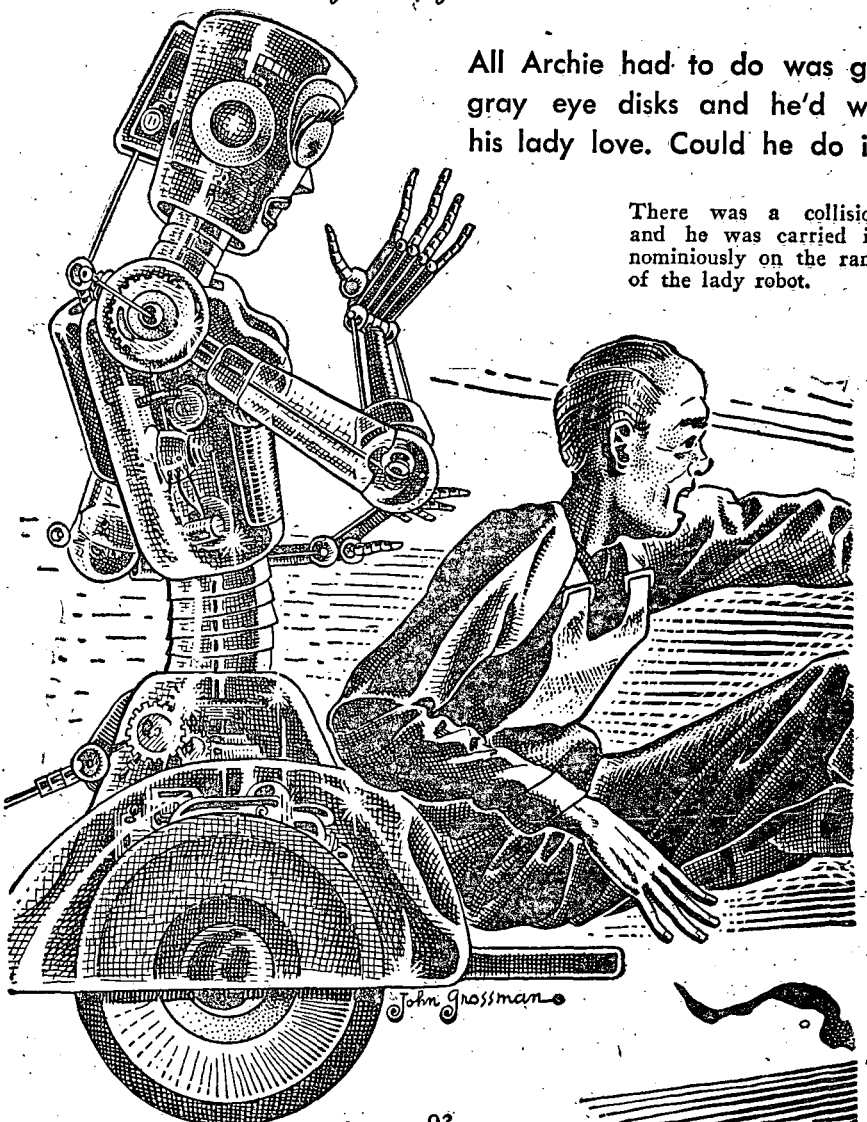
ROBOT ROMANCE

By Hodge Winsell

All Archie had to do was get gray eye disks and he'd win his lady love. Could he do it?



There was a collision, and he was carried ignominiously on the ramp of the lady robot.

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SAM Baker wore a smile on his wrinkled face as he stepped off of the conveyor belt and walked into Jinnegan's Juice Joint. The smile spread when the long-faced Irishman behind the bar looked at him sourly and asked, "What'll ya have?"

"Keep your wig on, Jinnegan," answered Sam, "I'm gonna wait for Archie." He started to laugh as the owner of the Juice Joint explored the white-top of his skull with nervous fingers. Sam said, "It's there all right."

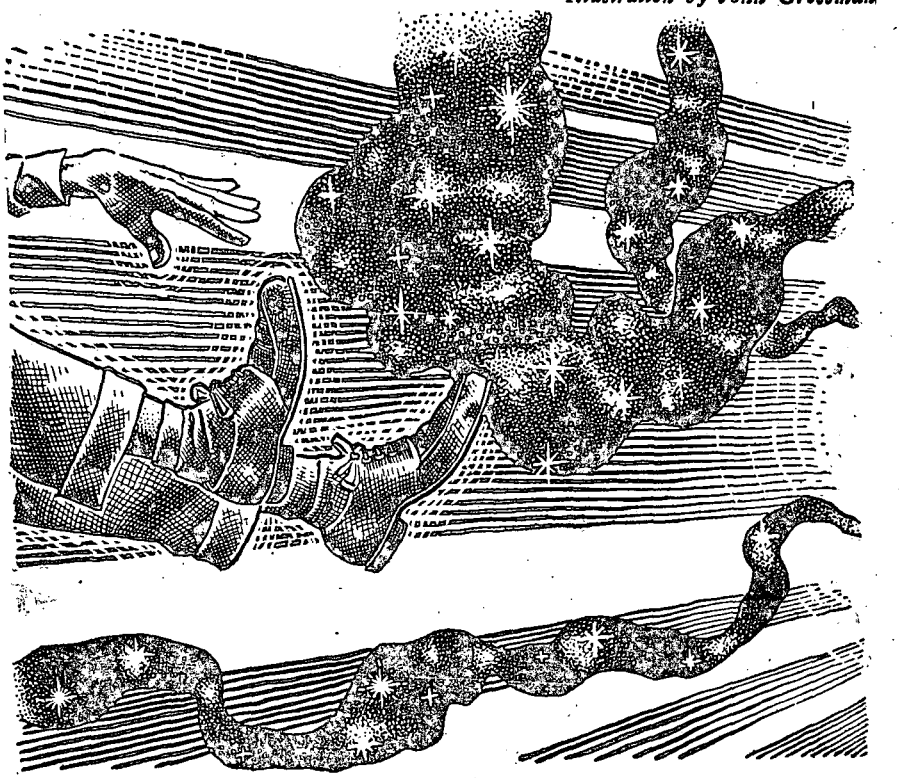
Jinnegan scowled. Then, he said, "That Archie is ruining my business."

"How do you figure that?" asked Sam. "I think he's good for business; he brought me and Ted Cox in here, didn't he? Ted and I are good customers; we haven't been around lately because he's on Mars right now."

Jinnegan pointed a long finger at the wall to Sam's right. "Take a look over there," he said, "that's how Archie is ruining business."

Sam turned. For a moment, he

Illustration by John Grossman



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couldn't understand what he was seeing; the hulks of transparent plastic resembled nothing he had seen before. Doubtfully, he identified the things as partially assembled robots. To make certain, he asked, "What in the world are those?"

"Gray-eyed robots," answered Jinnegan. He moved his pointing finger and indicated the robot at the extreme right. "That's Harry, the best customer any Juice Joint ever had." He dropped his voice to a confidential whisper. "Harry don't take anything but battery juice. Yes sir. Harry's the best customer I ever had. You don't ever see that Archie using battery juice; he uses the cheap stuff from the wall plugs."

"Oh! Archie's all right," said Sam. "Say, what happened to those robots?"

Jinnegan relaxed and placed both elbows on the bar. When he was leaning comfortably, he said, "The other night, Archie came in here without a credit on him. Harry was buying charges for every robot in the house and Archie joined the party. When he was all charged up, he took a fool notion that he wanted to shake dice. Since Archie didn't have any credits, he had to talk Harry into shaking for parts. He won Harry's back plate, his right arm, his wheels and the key to his fuse box. Then Archie offered to gamble what he'd won against one of Harry's gray eye discs; Harry refused and Archie quit the game."

"What about the other two?" asked Sam.

"Tom and Ralph! Archie stayed around after he broke up the game. A while later, those two rolled in and he did the same thing to them." Jinnegan dropped his voice to the confidential whisper again. "What burns me up is that I can't charge those robots rent; that's against the law."

"What was Archie's idea, anyhow?" asked Sam, "was it just that he was charged up?"

"Nah," answered Jinnegan, "he's made up his mind that he's gotta have gray eye discs; I don't know why. Myself, I think Archie's discs are kind of pretty."

"I'll have a Moon Mikara on that," said Sam; he reached in the hip pocket of his coveralls and produced a round piece of plastic that was worth a quarter of a credit. As he laid it on the bar, he caught Jinnegan giving him a dirty look. He glared when he heard Jinnegan mumble, "Good customer. Huh!"

"I can't help it if I can't afford Saturn Swizzles every time I come in here," said Sam, sharply. Craft peeked out of his blue eyes and he softened his tone as he added, "Do you want to trust me for a few Swizzles? I'll pay you when I get the credits."

Jinnegan rolled his dark eyes piously and intoned, "In God we

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trust."

Sam sighed. "Okay," he said, "give me that Mikara." He tried to blow all the breath from his body while the proprietor of the Juice Joint was lifting an atomizer from beneath the bar. When Sam was ready, Jinnegan squeezed the rubber bulb and Sam inhaled the green gas which squirted from the nozzle. The stuff vanished on Sam's third inhalation; he grinned at Jinnegan and said, "Not much waste there, was there?"

Jinnegan shook his head and replied, "You're as bad as Archie."

SAM was finishing his third Moon Mikara when Archie rolled into the Juice Joint. When Sam was certain that he'd inhaled all of the green gas, he turned to the robot and said, "Hi, pal."

"Hello, Tham," said Archie; his eye discs were half blue and half brown as he added, "Hello, Mithter Jinnegan." Sam laughed and the robot's round eye discs became rose colored when Jinnegan clamped both hands upon his wig and glared. The juice man kept his hands on top of his skull until Archie was waving a five credit note in his sponge-covered fingers. "Therve Tham a Thaturn Thwizzle" said the robot, "I'll have 10 volth when I get back."

Sam was curious so he watched as Archie rolled over to the three incapacitated robots. He saw Archie bend and explore several small compartments that were located in the rectangular platform upon which he was mounted. When the robot came erect, he was holding a handful of fuses and a ring of keys. Archie was transparent so Sam didn't miss what happened next.

Archie inserted a key into the breast plate of the robot Jinnegan had called Harry. When Harry hummed to life, Sam caught his first glance of a gray-eyed robot and he was seized by a terrible suspicion. He moved closer and listened intently to the conversation between the two robots.

Archie said, "Are you ready to do buthineth?"

The gray-eyed robot said, "Well, if it isn't the robot who can't say es."

Archie shook his bucket-shaped head and said, "Anther my quethtion."

"I won't give you an eye disc," said Harry, "and you know you'll be dismantled if you take one without my permission."

"I know," said Archie. He calmly inserted the blade of the key into an open socket inside Harry. There was a quick flash as Jinnegan's erstwhile best customer blew his fuse. Archie repeated his performance with the two robots Jinnegan had called Tom and Ralph. Sam was shaking his gray head soberly when Archie rolled to

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the bar and stopped beside him.

"What'th the matter, Tham?" asked the robot.

Sam noticed that Archie's eye discs were a troubled brown so he decided to keep his suspicion to himself. Jinnegan made a sound and Sam whirled, glad that he did not have to answer the robot. Sam watched the juice man carefully as he filled a pony glass with gray powder. He made the man wait until he blew his nose. When Sam bent over the bar, Jinnegan dropped a match into the pony glass and the Saturn Swizzle exploded. As long as the smoke from the explosion lasted, Sam dreamed that he was eating a chicken dinner which Jinnegan had paid for.

WHEN the smoke was gone, Sam saw that Archie had an electric cord plugged into his breast plate and that Jinnegan was watching a meter to make sure that the robot didn't get an extra volt. Sam grinned as he noticed the rosy glow in Archie's eye discs. Then, he grew serious as he turned and stared at the gray-eyed robots against the wall.

"What's the big idea?" Sam didn't realize that he had spoken aloud until Archie dreamily said, "What?"

Sam muttered under his breath; he waited until Jinnegan removed the plug from Archie and then he jerked his thumb toward the three gray-eyed robots against the wall and said, "Why do you want their eyes discs?"

"That'th a thecret," said Archie and his eye discs changed colors four times.

"I didn't think you had a mean streak in you, Archie," said Sam.

"Mean!" There was pain in the robot's voice and his discs turned a watery blue. "I'm not mean. Honetht, Tham."

"What you're doing to them is mean," said Sam who was still pointing at the three stricken robots. The rosy glow came to Archie's discs and in a voice full of dignity the robot said, "All ith fair in love and war."

"Love!"

"Yeth," said Archie, dreamily. He placed his hand over his fuse box and added, "I'm in love, Tham."

"What's that got to do with gray eyes?"

Archie dropped his hand to his side and said, "Thelma loveth gray eyeth; thhe thayth they are more thtable."

"I'll tell you why," shouted Sam, "more stable my monkey wrench."

To Sam's amazement, Archie calmly disconnected the microphones that were his ears. "I don't allow anyone to talk about Thelma in my prethence," said the robot. Just before he disconnected his speaking apparatus, he added, "I thought you were my friend, Tham."

Sam was so mad that he became

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reckless; he put his hand into his hip pocket and pulled out all the quarter credits he possessed. He threw the plastic coins on the bar and snarled, "Give me and Romeo a charge."

Jinnegan walked over and slid a plug into Archie's right ear-mike and then prepared Sam's Swizzle. Sam forgot his usual caution; he sniffed the gray powder in the pony glass before Jinnegan was ready with the match. Some of the powder must have gone up Sam's nose for when the juice man lighted the Swizzle, Sam was blown out of the Juice Joint and draped around a lady robot who was on the point of entering the place.

"Well!" exclaimed the lady robot.

"Sorry," mumbled Sam. He tried to get off her platform but decided that the effort wasn't worth it since she was entering Jinnegan's anyhow. Sam crawled off when the lady robot rolled to a stop a few feet from Archie.

In a soulful voice, the lady robot said, "Archie."

Archie frantically plugged in his hearing and speaking apparati and in an equally soulful voice replied, "Thelma."

SAM caught a glimpse of the lady robot's steady gray eyes before Jinnegan, who had left his place behind the bar, swung a club at his head and shouted, "Now, you're trying to ruin my business."

Sam dodged behind the lady robot; he saw Jinnegan coming around her in one direction so he ran the other. He was aware that the lady robot was pointing at him and as he circled her the second time he heard her ask, "Is this one of your low friends?"

Sam jumped behind Archie in time to hear him say, "Yeth, Thelma."

Jinnegan was gaining as Sam heard the lady robot say, "My name is Selma, not Thelma." Sam passed Archie as he said, "That'th what I thaid, Thelma." The club swished as Sam jumped between the two robots in time to hear Selma say, "You must drop these low companions."

Sam ran around the robots once more; he looked over his shoulder and saw that Jinnegan was just one step behind him. The club swung and Sam ducked. Jinnegan missed and waved his arms to keep his balance; his white wig fell off as Sam stepped behind Archie. Sam kept going until he was once more behind the lady robot. Then, he stopped for breath and leaned against her.

"Tham," said Archie in an outraged voice.

"Make Jinnegan stop," panted Sam.

"Get your handth off Thelma," shouted Archie.

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"Make Jinnegan stop," repeated Sam.

Archie's discs were changing colors so rapidly that Sam wasn't sure what was going to happen. To his relief, the robot produced a five credit note and stuck it under Jinnegan's nose. The owner of the Juice Joint grabbed the note and then picked up his wig. As he returned to his place behind the bar, Jinnegan pointed at Sam and shouted, "No more for him."

"I should say not," said Selma.

"Tham . . . " began Archie, miserably.

"I don't want no more," shouted Sam. He glared at the two robots and added, "Are you coming with me, Archie?"

Selma said, "Archie, if you ever again associate with this horrible man our beautiful friendship is over."

"It's over anyhow," shouted Sam.

"You thut up," said Archie.

"What did he mean, dear?" asked Selma.

"I don't know and I don't care," said Archie.

Sam opened his mouth but no words came. He suddenly realized that he could not prove what he suspected. He fingered the head of his wrench thoughtfully and looked at the partially dismounted robots. He could. No! That was against the law and besides Archie was too much in love to accept factual evidence. He moved so he could hear the conversation between Archie and Selma. Archie was saying, "You have the most beautiful eyeth in the world."

"I wish yours were like mine," answered the lady robot.

"They will be," promised Archie.

"Then, you will be the robot for me," said Selma. Archie's eye discs were glowing at the promise in her voice when she added, "Honey."

"Yeth."

"Will you do something for me?"

"Yeth. Anything!"

"Anything?"

"Yeth."

"Let Harry and Ralph and Tom go."

Sam stopped listening; he had an idea. He leaned across the bar and stared at the electric cords which Jinnegan had removed from the two robots. If . . . S-l-lop. Sam hadn't heard the juice man's soft-footed approach. Sam's head was covered with the grimy sediment of Mercury nuts. The stuff stuck like honey but it could be poured. Sam howled, and then went to wash. When he returned, Archie was gone.

SAM walked up to the lady robot and said, "Where's Archie?"

"I don't care to speak to you," said Selma.

Sam decided that he had to bluff. "You'd better, sister," he said; "I know all about it."

"I don't know what you are talk-

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ing about."

"I'm talking about stable gray eyes like yours."

"Indeed!"

Sam was amazed at this reaction. Could he be wrong? Archie would never speak to him again if he was. Maybe it would be better to leave things the way they were? Suffering Space Cramps! Had he lost his nerve? He'd run this bluff. Sam said, "I'll treat you to 110 volts from the wall socket."

He regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth. If Selma accepted, he was really in trouble. He didn't have a credit on him. Jinnegan would call the police for sure. He could have kissed the lady robot when she exclaimed, "No!"

"Why not?" asked Sam.

Selma said, "I don't care to have anything to do with you."

"I insist," said Sam.

"You do know something," said Selma, "are you going to tell Archie?"

"No," said Sam, "you are."

Archie came rolling in and his platform was loaded with spare robot parts; he went directly to the three robots who stood against the wall and began assembling them, Harry was the first one reassembled; he rolled to Selma's side and said, "This has gone far enough."

The lady robot pointed at Sam and said, "He knows."

"What are you going to do?" asked Harry.

Sam had an inspiration. He said, "I'm going to report this to the Board of Robot Control."

"Okay," said Harry, "how much do you want?"

"Just give Archie back the money he's spent on her," said Sam pointing at Selma. Harry nodded. He bent over his platform and when he straightened Sam was handed a roll of credit notes.

Sam watched Archie replace the final part of the robot named Ralph. When the four gray-eyed robots were clustered together, Sam said, "Tell him now, Selma."

"Tell me what?" asked Archie. panions.

"Tell me what?" asked Archie.

"Archie, dear," said the lady robot, "there can be nothing between us."

Archie's eye discs turned a horror-stricken red. He asked, "Ith there thomeone elth?"

"Nooo." said Selma.

The discs turned rosy. Archie said, "Then, there'th a chance for me."

"No, Archie." Selma rolled close to him and whispered. Sam was shocked at what happened. He had seen Archie short circuit many times but never like this. Archie's eye discs rotated so fast that all the colors of the spectrum were a confused blur. Then, he filled with smoke. The smoke collected in his skull case and escaped in a black

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cloud. Sam was choked and his eyes watered. When the smoke cleared away, Selma and her friends were gone. Patiently, Sam began to replace Archie's blown fuses.

"What happened?" asked Jinnegan.

Sam didn't answer; he just slipped another fuse into Archie. Jinnegan persisted and finally, Sam said, "I'll tell you for a Swizzle." He popped some more fuses into Archie while Jinnegan thought it over but stopped when the juice man said, "Okay," and prepared the Swizzle.

"They're incompatible," said Sam, "he's AC and she's DC."

THE END

BOOK REVIEWS (*Continued from page* 53)

one very poor volume.

Best-liked by this reviewer is *Men Against The Stars*, edited by Martin Greenberg (Gnome Press, $2.95). A striking dust jacket by Edd Cartier illustrates the theme of the book, another "history" idea in which the twelve stories presented are arranged to form the over-all story of the conquest of space. "Trends" by Isaac Asimov is the opening tale, telling of man's first attempts to send a rocket to the moon; "When Shadows Fall" by L. Ron Hubbard is the closing tale, of a far distant day when not only the moon but all of space was conquered, and earth itself was almost forgotten by the people who pushed outward. Between these two are the struggles and problems that beset a race travelling from the moon to the far reaches.

Outstanding are "Locked Out" by Fyfe—what would you do if you were locked out of your spaceship?; "Far Centaurus" by Van Vogt; "Schedule" by Walton; and "The Iron Standard" by Padgett.

A far more ambitious, more reaching but yet less satisfying anthology is August Derleth's *Beyond Time and Space* (Pellegrini & Cudahy, $4.50). Dipping far into the past in search of science fiction, Derleth here presents stories by Plato, Lucian, Sir Thomas More, Rabelais, Campanella, Francis Bacon, Swift, Kepler, Godwin, Holberg, Poe, Verne, HG Wells, Allen, Stockton, and Bellamy—just about everyone, in fact, but Shakespeare and even he may be there f you are a Bacon decrier. It is a large book of more than 600 pages, and also included in it are the more modern writers: Keller, Smith, Wandrei, Weinbaum, Hamilton, van Vogt, Padgett, Leiber, Long, Sturgeon, Heinlein and Bradbury.

Derleth has succeeded in compiling a record of science fiction through the ages—if you like to keep such records.

Finally, Donald Wollheim is again in print with an anthology, *Flight Into Space* (Frederick Fell, $2.75). This is one of those books you'll buy only if you must have a copy of everything printed, or you are a newcomer to the science fiction field and anything having a spaceship on the cover looks good to you. Considering the vast amount of material now on hand for the picking, editor Wollheim must have had his eyes shut when he chose the twelve tales for this volume.

The authors included are Coblentz, Long, Weinbaum, Abernathy, Phillips, Williams, Pearson, Jones, Wollheim, Harris, Breuer, and Stone. Each story revolves about a flight to or action on some solar body: the sun, the moon, the asteroids, and each of the planets. Plausible idea but poor choices.

—*Bob Tucker*

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LETTERS (*Continued from page 91*)

my head between my ears.

But seriously, I hope you can print my request in your mag as I may have had a letter from this 'H.A.B.' which got mislaid, and if such is the case he'll have a poor opinion of me for not writing. Anyway, my thanks in advance.

47 Moorpark Rd.
Turves Green
Northfield
Birmingham 31
England

There you are Ron, and now perhaps your elusive 'H.A.B.,' will step forward and identify himself—or maybe it's a 'herself'. Thanks for putting us so near the top on your list of prozines. We're going to keep on aiming for the top place on that list.—Ed.

The recent editorial about reprint mags has stirred up quite a bit of comment from the readers. Instead of trying to print all of the letters received, we'll present portions of the more representative ones.

Tom Covington

I read that "author's note" in the editorial with mixed feelings. My favorite type of reading is long fantasy. Not science fiction, but fantasy. The only three mags on the market that give me what I want to read—long fantasy—are reprints. They also have the best covers and interior illustrations in the business. I share the sentiments of my friend, Jim Maneval, whom I shall quote because I'm too lazy to put this into my own words:

"Tch Tch, I'm a disagreeable soul, I am I am I am. I ABSOLUTELY DID NOT LIKE the part of the editorial in OW about the reprint mags. In fact . . . if I get up the nerve, I'll write 'em about it. Well, maybe I don't entirely disagree, but I think the reprint mags SHOULD be on the stands. For instance take FN and FFM. If it weren't for them what would become of the Merritales, the England tomes, and all those classics??? The new fan would simply have to buy the preposterously priced back issues or the books, which are even worse. And I well know, the average fan can't afford that. If it weren't for those two mags, a lot of old—but good—fantasy would lie around in the clutches of collectors, and never be printed at all or read by fans who haven't a million bucks to spend on sf and fantasy."

But while I share Jim's feelings as a fan, I can also see the author's viewpoint. I want to be an author myself someday, and I'll admit I don't want a lot of reprint mags cluttering up the shelves of the newsstands and bringing down the value of my manuscripts as well as holding down the number of markets I can submit to. I know! I'll wait 'till I start submitting to the prozines before I run the reprint mags out of business!

Seriously, being selfish and prone to look after my own welfare rather than that of others, I would rather see the reprints left the way they are at this time.

315 Dawson St.
Wilmington, N. C.

Edward Wood

This letter is a reply to the unknown professional writer who was so bitter against reprints and gave the rather standard moans and groans to be found in the writer's magazine. For the sake of convenience I shall refer to him as Mr. X. I think he miscontrues his problem which is really one of obtaining higher rates for pulp writing.

I cannot see how it is possible for pulp publishers under the present economic conditions to increase its word rates except for the most exceptional writers. The price of paper, ink, printing etc. have increased much more in the last decade than the circulation of pulp magazines. Considering the increased population

(*Continued on page 121*)

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He landed his space ship on Earth, having fled from his Martian masters—only to find that the men of Earth were no more than highly-developed robots; and proceeded to prove it quite logically.

Illustration by Bill Terry

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CONDITIONED REFLEX

By William F. Temple

ARTHUR had bought the record of Mossolov's *Steel Foundry* and insisted on playing it over and over again, while he lay back in the armchair with his eyes shut and bliss on his face. The room rocked to the sound of great pistons that needed oiling and the efforts of the clumsy giant who kept dropping bags of assorted scrap-iron.

Seth Barnard could stand it no more. Gingerly, he got up and tried to tiptoe out. His sleeve-buttons brushed against a steel ash tray and produced a faint metallic *ping!*

Arthur bounced up in his chair and tore his hair. He registered anguish, pain, disappointment, shock, high blood pressure, animal rage, and a few other things it was difficult to put a finger on in the short time the show was on.

He roared, "You ungainly oaf! You've ruined it."

"The sound—" began Seth, but he had no chance against Mossolov. He waited until the steel foundry had closed down, and said: "The sound I made is at least known to musical notation, which is more than any of that din is."

"Din?" repeated Arthur, now putting in some pretty good facial work on astonishment. "Din? Are you *quite* mad?"

"Sometimes I wonder. I must be. Else why should I stay here enduring your performances as a jitterbug on the high wire, and your infernal records of street noises, and this dead-and-alive hole known —to nobody except its inhabitants— as Peterville?"

"So we're back to that, huh? This was where I came in, about a year ago. You were belly-aching then that nothing ever happened in Peterville. Then those atom creatures came and made this place a miracle town, poured gold on you, gave you a newspaper and a fine swimming pool—"

"There's only two inches of water in the pool now, and I'm not a flatfish," snapped Seth. "The atom things ought to have remembered that it never rains here. Anyway, that was all of a year ago. I've had nothing since to put in the newspaper except Births, Deaths, and Marriages, and I've had to invent most of those just to give people something to talk about."

He went to the window and stared gloomily out.

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"I'm not asking much," he said. "An earthquake or two, a few murders, a suicide or so, just to show someone's *living* around here."

"Living?" echoed Arthur. "By the sound of it, if you had your way you'd slay us all for your—"

"Hey, what was that?" interrupted Seth, on his toes, trying to put his face through the glass.

"For once you ought to know what you're talking about: you're there, not me."

"Something flashed down across the sky — a red, glowing thing. Seemed to land out there in the desert. Look, you can see a faint trail in the sky."

Arthur jumped up, bounded to a closet, and then bounded to the window. A kangaroo couldn't have done it better.

"Lemme see . . . Ha, a meteorite, as I thought! You can see where it hit—there, where the trail ends. Must be all of twenty miles off. Let me get a bearing on it."

He shoved Seth aside and juggled with the compass he'd picked out of the closet.

"In a few moments," he said, "we should hear the sound of it landing."

Almost immediately there came a noise like a door slamming far off. They wouldn't have noticed it if they hadn't been listening for it. Peterville at large ignored it.

"Here's something for your rag," said Arthur. "Come on."

"It might have been if it had landed twenty miles nearer," said Seth, gloomily. "It's just wasted itself out there in the desert — hasn't killed a soul." He followed Arthur to the garage.

THE area Arthur had calculated to contain the impact point was miles off the road. They bumped as near to it as they could in the car, weaving across the sand and through the cacti, and then they walked for another couple of miles or so. There were so many ridges looking so much alike in these parts that you had to keep track of your position by taking compass bearings continually, otherwise you were likely to wander in vast circles until you died.

They topped a ridge, and there below them, half buried in the sandy floor of the shallow valley, was what they were looking for.

"Seems to be a misguided missile," said Arthur, staring at the slim, fifty-foot rocket.

"The next war will probably start through the Army blowing up its own launching ground with a boomerang rocket and thinking it's being attacked," said Seth. "Darn it, that's killed my headline: A VISITOR FROM OUTER SPACE. I can't blow this up into anything much."

They went down the slope towards the thing.

A thin man with a frowning

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yellow face stepped out suddenly from behind the rocket. He wore a leather suit like the unheated one of the old-fashioned aviator. He pointed a tubular instrument, about a foot long, at them, and pressed a trigger on it. It went *click-click*, but nothing else happened. With an indistinct oath, the man started fiddling with dials set in its butt.

"Lordy!" said Seth. "And no place to hide."

It didn't appear safe to try to scramble back up the slope.

"There's only one sensible thing to do," said Arthur, and put up his hands.

"Perhaps you're right." Seth did the same.

The man, having re-set the dials, again pointed the instrument at them and pulled the trigger. *Click-click*. Nothing else.

"Hey!" said Arthur, loudly. "Don't you know the rules? Can't you see we've got our hands up? What more do you want us to do—sing to you?"

"Spare me that," said the man, with a heavy but unplaceable accent. "And take your hands down—you look ridiculous. Is either of you mechanically-minded? This thing won't work."

"We'd love to repair your gun so that you could shoot us," said Arthur. "Or would you prefer us to jump off a cliff?"

"It's not a gun. It's a robot-control. I landed the ship badly and broke a few things, including this, it seems."

"You—You were in that rocket?" said Seth, incredulously.

"Certainly. You don't think I walked from Mars?"

"MARS?" Seth and Arthur made a chorus of it.

"That's what you call it, isn't it?"

Seth just gulped. Arthur walked up to the man and looked at him keenly. He looked perhaps sixty, with white hair straying from under the helmet.

"You certainly did land with a bump, didn't you?" said Arthur. "How does your head feel?"

"I'm quite all right. I didn't land on my head."

"How long have you had jaundice?"

The man sighed. "It's the natural complexion on Mars. I am a Martian. I was born there. This is my first trip to Earth, although, of course, I know all about it. I'm *not* a deranged Earth-robot with delusions. Darn this thing! If I could only get it to work, I shouldn't have to stand here arguing with you."

"Why not?" asked Seth, coming up.

"Because it's a robot-control, and you are robots."

Seth and Arthur looked at each other, and shrugged slightly.

Arthur said: "What's your name,

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Martian?"

"Burp," said the man.

Arthur waited politely. There was a silence.

Arthur tried again. "I said, what's your name?"

"Burp," said the man.

"His name's Burp," said Seth, gleefully.

"Indeed?" said Arthur. "I was beginning to think it was Karel Capek. Burp. Oh, well, it was bound to happen. Edgar Rice Burroughs used up all the polite names. Even he touched the funny-bone sometimes. Well, Burp, I think you'd better come home with us. Unless you prefer to travel by rocket?"

"The ship's all right," said Burp, "but I never use it for journeys of less than a million miles. Anyway, I doubt whether I shall ever want to use it again."

"Why, aren't you going back to Mars to tell them all about us?"

"They know it all. That's why I left the place. You can't tell them anything. Any time you start to speak to anyone, they say 'I know just what you're going to say,' and you're wrong.' I just had to get away from them so that I could go and live among some simple, ignorant people."

"That's why you came here?" asked Seth.

"Naturally."

"You've made a ghastly mistake, brother. Arthur here is the one man in the world who knows everything about everything. He'll soon have you on the lam again."

"He's exaggerating," said Arthur. "Actually, there are one or two things I'm ignorant about — but they're things just not worth knowing. By the way, where and how did you learn English?"

"Your radio broadcasts, of course. I speak all your Earthly languages, except Scotch, which I can't manage because I've only got one tongue. Talking of Scotch, I hope you have some at your home?"

"If I had my way, alcohol would be used only for rocket fuel and for pickling bodies," said Arthur, loftily.

"Come on, Burp," said Seth. "Let's go pickle our bodies."

THEY were a long time getting back to the car because the compass needle developed a fault and kept thinking that the North Magnetic Pole was in Jamaica. After which, it discovered its mistake and pointed to the Azores. Then it went in for ballet, and did some pretty pirouettes.

"You must have overwound it," accused Seth, but Arthur stuck the thing in his pocket and said: "I don't need it. The car's over in that direction."

"How do you know?" asked Seth.

"Because I can see it."

Seth drove, and in the back of the car an argument developed be-

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"I am *not* a robot—I can show you my birth certificate," Arthur was saying indignantly.

"You are. All you Earth people are. You're merely machines run to seed. Your earliest ancestors were the slave-machines we Martians brought here to do our fetching and carrying when we first explored this planet, a million or more years ago. We left the things behind — they weren't worth taking back."

"That's lunatic talk!" stormed Arthur. "Worse—it's—it's science-fiction!"

That was the nastiest insult in Arthur's extensive collection: he was an earnest student of science. The employment of it meant that he was really getting het up.

It became a dog-fight. Seth caught only bits of it, as the car rattled noisily along the dusty road toward Peterville.

"Your own behaviorists will tell you . . . Touch the cornea and you blink . . . Pavlov . . . dog . . . All habits . . . chains of conditioned responses . . . completely predictable from known stimuli . . . "

"Nonsense!" Arthur was shouting. "You're trying to prove through behaviorism that reasoning doesn't exist and at the same time you're trying to prove by reasoning that behaviorism doesn't exist you can't have it both ways."

"I can!" cried Burp. "*I* can reason about behaviorism because I'm not subject to its laws. I'm free to reason, think, and act for myself. You can't reason at all—only pull out chains of ideas linked together: you're like a phonograph and half-a-dozen records."

Arthur made vague screaming noises, indicative of disgust, contempt, anger, refutation, accusation, and general disagreement.

"Control yourself, Arthur, or you'll overheat your bearings," Seth shouted back over his shoulder, maliciously.

They were entering Peterville. Seth slowed down. The car overtook old man Smith ambling along the wayside.

" 'Morning, Smithy," called Seth.

"Howdy, Seth. What you got in the back—coupla coyotes?"

"Only Arthur and a Martian," said Seth.

"Yeah? Where did he buy it?"

"I believe it bought him," Seth called back.

When they reached the bungalow, Arthur shot out of the car as if he'd been catapulted. His gangling figure vanished through the doorway, shouting over its shoulder: "Come on, I'll show you in black and white!"

As Burp started to get out, Seth said: "Hold it a moment—let him go. I'm the editor of the newspaper here—I want a story for tomorrow's edition. Give me the low-down on Mars and the Martians. Do they favor pajamas or the old-fashioned nightie? How many

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wives are you allowed? Have you killed off your politicians yet? Do you have racketeers? Do——"

"I'm a journalist myself," said Burp, coldly, "and my price for contributions of that sort is a dollar a word."

Oh, so you *do* have racketeers," said Seth, equally coldly. "Okay, go in and drink my Scotch. My price is five bucks a finger. Never mind about the article—I'll make it up."

"I'm sure you would have done so in any case," said Burp, and turned and walked into the bungalow.

SETH went round to the composing room and set up a double column about Mars, the Martians, and Burp in particular. Half of it came out of *Popular Astronomy*, there was a steal from Wells, and the rest of it, dealing with Burp in particular, came out of Seth's own head. It appeared that Mars had become too hot to hold Burp . . .

When he entered the lounge, there was a cold war on.

They were on to cybernetics now.

"Just a matter of negative feedback," Burp was saying. "Excessive feedback in a steering gear is exactly the same as purpose tremor caused by an injury to the cerebellum. A neurosis is merely wild oscillation of the mechanism —'hunting'—before it breaks down completely."

"I'll grant you that the brain cells are simple relays—" began Arthur.

"Do you also grant me that your nervous system includes devices for integrating, differentiating, frequency modulations, wave synthesis, storage, scanning, and group transformations from one co-ordinate system to another?"

"Being *my* nervous system, those are just its simplest devices," snapped Arthur. "However, I know what you're going to say—"

Burp groaned. "Don't say that. You sound like a Martian."

"All right, I'll admit it—our technicians have reproduced all of those devices electrically, both separately and combined. But none of their contrivances has produced any poetry yet."

"Poetry is basically only emotion. Your elementary machines have produced emotion. Look, in this issue of *Electronic Engineering*—"

"I know what you're going to say," said Arthur.

Burp shrieked. "Don't say that! It makes me mad!"

"The homeostat," said Arthur.

Burp threw his leather helmet across the room. He tore at his springing white hair. Seth thought: Why, he looks just like Arthur! Except for the jaundice.

Burp said fiercely: "I insist on instancing this case."

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"Then tell him," said Arthur, boredly, indicating Seth, and sat down and put his feet up.

"Yes, tell me," said Seth. "Nobody ever tells *me* anything."

Books and journals were lying strewn all over the chairs, the bureau, the occasional table, and the phonograph. They were ankle-deep on the floor, and Burp came plowing through them at Seth.

"All right," he said, "listen to me, Barnard. This is the sort of thing you should put in your newspaper instead of idle chit-chat. The homeostat is a machine designed by Dr. W. R. Ashby, and demonstrated by the Electroenchephalographic Society at the Burden Neurological Institute, in Bristol, England, on May 1st, 1948."

"How d'you spell it?" said Seth, taking notes.

"What?"

"Bristol."

"Never mind. The homeostat is a group of four electro-magnets, supplying a self-feedback, and with 390,625 combinations of feedback patterns to choose from. The four magnets are free to swing and seek a stable, balanced point, just as an animal seeks its optimal condition. So it is goal-seeking, just as you robots are goal-seeking, using negative feedback to swing you on the line to your goal."

"My goal at the moment is a Scotch," said Seth, getting it. He drank it at a gulp.

Burp stared at him.

"Go on," said Seth. "I don't understand a word of it, but maybe my readers might. Maybe."

"My price for further information is a snifter."

Seth gave him one.

"AH!" said Burp afterward, looking a little less jaundiced. He continued: "I'll put it simply, as you're simple-minded. Negative feedback is the resultant of impulses received from yourself and your goal so that you are guided to make the distance between them zero, as in a radar-controlled anti-aircraft gun, receiving impulses from the target plane and its own shells. Without feedback, it would aim anywhere; with positive feedback, it would try to miss the plane by the greatest distance—a neurotic procedure, defeating the *raison d'etre* of the machine."

"Like the way you're missing the point," interjected Arthur.

Burp ignored him, and went on: "Animals, as you style yourselves, work on basically the same principle, though you have fashioned many different feedback combinations and have learned to use them. A cat, for instance, with its goal of self-preservation, learns to go *toward* red meat (negative feedback) and *away* from red fire (positive feedback). As a kitten, its behavior is merely chaotic—"

"So are your facts," yawned Ar-

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thur. "Cats are color-blind."

Burp quivered with silent rage.

"What's that?" said Seth, watching him interestedly. "Oscillation setting in?"

Burp took hold of himself with an effort. "Another Scotch," he muttered.

Seth poured him a stiff one, emptying the bottle.

"I'm beginning to see how you got your name," he said. "Come on, give."

"Ah!" Burp sighed as he put down the glass. "Well, a mammalian brain, you see, is just a machine that has learned how to approach its goal by a flexible route, its aim remaining unchanging. If one path is blocked, it works out another. It works out essential parts of its own wiring. So does the homeostat. Its inventor did everything he could think of to stop the magnets from reaching their stable arrangement. But between them they always worked out a new circuit so that they got there."

"What did he do?" asked Seth.

"He reversed the polarity, even the magnets themselves. He put physical obstructions in the way of a free swing of the magnets. He tied two of them together with glass fibre, so that they had to move together. Whatever conditions he imposed, they beat him."

"That's a point you'd better consider," said Arthur, lazily. "The homeostat developed to play chess, for instance, could eventually play with subtlety and strategy beyond that of the inventor himself. Now—"

"I know what you're going to say!" said Burp, furiously. "Don't flatter yourself. Your model is known to us Martians as Mark B. VII—a primitive and very inferior one. There's no comparing you and me—I'm not a machine, but a natural product, of beauty, delicacy, wonder and infinite complexity. Whereas you and your materialistic, miserable little ten billion thermionic tubes, a mere *machina ratiocinatrix*—"

HIS voice was drowned by a flood of music.

"Brahms' First Symphony!" shouted Arthur, shutting the lid of the phonograph. "No machine created that!"

"Emotional stuff, and emotional reasoning!" bawled Burp. "The homeostat produces any amount of emotion. Put obstructions in its way and it will exhibit all the signs of frustration and disappointment. It sulks inactively, then shows hysterical over-action and frantic over-compensation, and if you—"

"For crying out loud!" exclaimed Seth, going to the phonograph and turning it off. "Let's have a truce. This nerve war is getting me down. What about some lunch?"

"I'm not hungry," growled Burp. "But I'm still thirsty."

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"Okay, then let's all go over to Ted's Bar and get to be pals—"

"Count me out," said Arthur, nastily. "I'm not one of those natural products of beauty and delicacy which need constant pick-me-ups. I'm only a poor old robot with a weakness for primitive noises. I guess there must be a short in my circuit somewhere."

IT was very quiet in Ted's Bar, because Ted was the only person there and he was not given to speaking to himself—or much to anyone else.

"Two double Scotches, Ted," said Seth. "Meet my friend, Burp—he's just come from Mars."

"Pleased to meet you," said Ted, setting out the glasses. "Have a nice trip?"

"So-so," said Burp.

Seth took the drinks and Burp over into a corner, out of earshot of Ted.

"I have to apologize for Arthur's behavior, Burp," he said, quietly. "I'm always having to do it. He's a good guy, quite bright in his way, but too tense. He doesn't know how to relax. If he'd only behave like a human being, have a smoke and a drink now and again, see things in their proper perspective instead of bursting blood vessels over molehills—"

"He can't behave like a human being because he's a robot," said Burp, reflectively. "But he's gone off the beam—his mechanism is 'hunting.' Most unstable. But don't worry about me—I can handle him."

Seth sipped his Scotch, watching Burp over the glass.

"You're really on the up-and-up about our being robots, aren't you?" he said, presently.

"Yes, of course. If only I could get this robot-control to work . . ."

He was still carrying the instrument, and he frowned at it and played with it.

"I must get me a banner-line: MARTIAN SAYS ALL EARTHMEN MECHANICAL TOYS. No, that won't do. What about—*Jumping Jehosophat!*"

"That won't do, either," said Burp. "There's no point to it."

But Seth was gaping over Burp's shoulder at a quite unprecedented spectacle, one which put Martians and their utterances in the shade.

ARTHUR had entered the bar. It was as though an archbishop had entered the lowest dive on the San Francisco waterfront.

He was obviously ill at ease and uncomfortable, and equally obviously doing his best to conceal it and look amused, detached, and tolerant about it, as though he were being shown over the place against his real inclinations and didn't like to offend the guide. But he couldn't quite control his puritanical nostrils, which every now and then

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twitched and said: "How sordid!"

With him was Doc Benson, the surgeon at the hospital.

"Hello, Arthur," said Seth. "Slumming?"

But Arthur had gone deaf. He looked around with a faint, fixed smile, and hummed tunelessly to show that he was quite unperturbed.

"Hiya, Seth," said the Doc. "What'll you and your friend have?"

"Hi, Doc. Scotch, thanks—that okay for you, Burp?"

Burp nodded.

The Doc went to the bar, and ordered. "What's for you, Arthur?" he called.

"Coco-cola, thanks."

"Straight?"

"Er—yes."

The Doc brought the drinks on a tray into the corner, and tried to maneuver everyone into a chummy little circle. But Arthur kept slipping out of his hands like a bit of wet soap and remained hovering uncertainly on the fringe. It was as if he were expecting the cops to raid the joint at any moment and didn't want to be identified with the group of debauchees.

"What's the matter, Arthur?" asked Seth. "Delirium tremens isn't infectious."

"If it were, I'd have caught it long ago," snapped Arthur, but the old fire was lacking. Seth grinned and enjoyed himself. Arthur was so habitually the master of his environment that it made a welcome change to see him in the rare role of a fish out of water. But it was all very odd: why had Arthur cast himself for such a totally unsuitable role?

Another odd thing soon became noticeable. Doc Benson kept up a running fire of small talk and wisecracks that mostly misfired, and never once referred to Burp as a Martian or evinced any curiosity about where he'd come from and why. It was odd because curiosity about other people's business was the salient characteristic of the Doc.

Doc became boastful about the new Peterville Hospital, its furnishings, grounds, apparatus, and so forth.

"All going to waste," he said, "because we haven't had a single darned patient since the place opened. I just haven't anything to do except sit in Ted's bar here and try to work up an appetite. We have the best darned cook you ever saw—why not come along to lunch, Seth, and bring your friend? We've steaks today—the way Joe does 'em they'll be as sweet as a nut."

"No, thanks, Doc, I've got a heavy date with the linotype."

"How 'bout you, friend?"

"I'm not hungry," said Burp.

Arthur whispered something in the Doc's ear.

"That so?" said the Doc. "H'm.

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Well, I guess we'll be getting along."

"We?" said Seth.

"Arthur's accepted my lunch invitation."

"I've left some cold ham for you, Seth," said Arthur. "But there's—er—only one pickled onion left."

"Wish you'd keep your fingers out of that jar," grumbled Seth.

"Oh," said the Doc, as if he'd just remembered it. "I've got to replenish the cellar."

He bought two bottles of Scotch from Ted, while Burp looked on with thirsty eyes.

"Sure you're not coming along?" said the Doc, with a sidelong glance.

"Sure," said Seth.

"I think I shall, after all," said Burp, hurriedly, "if you don't mind."

"Sure, come along," said the Doc, and Seth saw a look of triumph flick over Arthur's face as the three of them went out.

"Well, what do you know, Ted?" Seth said. "Never thought I'd live to see the day that Arthur came in here."

"You can never tell about people," said Ted, sententiously.

"Arthur isn't people. The Martian's right—he's just a calculating machine. But I wish I knew what he's calculating at this moment."

SETH cut half of the *Popular Astronomy*, gave the late Mr. Wells back his property, and reworded the Burp section to give a much more sympathetic picture of him and his statements and behavior. It might have been because of the whiskey's mellowing effect. It might have been because Seth regarded Burp more warmly now he had shared a friendly drink with him—which one could never do with Arthur. It made Burp appear much the more human of the two.

Or perhaps it was because he felt a little afraid for Burp. To one ignorant of Arthur's nature, the war paint was invisible, no smoke signals stained the sky, and the drums were silent. But Seth knew that Arthur was on the war-path, and his goal was Burp's scalp. And if he had to use double negative feedback to reach that goal, he would. Seth wished now that he had been quick enough to have warned Burp.

He spent a long time over the story, and when he went around to the lounge Arthur and his intended victim had returned and were at it again.

Burp was saying loudly: "The work of Watson and Rayner and Lecky has shown that nothing else so far observed will produce the fear response in early infancy but a loud sound or a sudden loss of support. They are the fundamental unconditioned stimuli calling out a fear reaction. Every baby, except

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one, of a batch of a thousand examined by them was found to catch its breath or cry when a loud sound was made behind its head or when the blanket was jerked away from under it."

"I *was* that thousandth baby," said Arthur, grimly. "I'm the exception which proves the rule."

There was a loud bang on the door-knocker, and Arthur jumped a foot.

Seth laughed. "I'll go." No one heard him. The argument gathered fury, became a storm. They were both shouting at once, now—it was like a mildly dramatic moment in an Orson Welles film.

THE caller was a pretty young nurse from the Peterville Hospital. She pushed a large buff envelope into Seth's hand and said: "For Arthur, with Doc Benson's compliments. I believe Arthur is waiting for it."

"Thanks, Hilda. Why not come on in?"

"No, thanks. It sounds too noisy in there. I prefer peace and quiet."

"So do I," said Seth. "What about tomorrow evening, around six, back of the swimming pool? That's a quiet spot."

"Okay," said Hilda. "Bring a friend—but not Arthur this time. I want to keep my friends."

Seth grinned and saw her off. Then he examined what was in the envelope and stopped grinning. When he was able to, he started thinking. Then he parked the envelope just outside the door of the lounge and once again braved the field of battle.

"You only get the backwash of it in back areas like Mars," Arthur was stating, not so very far from the top of his voice. "I'm in the forefront of scientific research here, and I'm telling you that the latest work has shown that fear and rage can be evoked in totally *new* situations, in which learning by conditioning has not been involved."

"Is this one of them?" asked Seth, but he might as well have been in the wilderness.

Arthur went braying on: "Hebb has demonstrated *spontaneous* fear in chimpanzees by suddenly showing them mutilated and dismembered bodies and other such unusual stimuli. The point is, being laboratory bred chimpanzees, they had had no previous experience of that sort. It's quite obvious that merely a shock to one's sense of fitness of things—"

"All this is a shock to *my* sense of fitness of things!" bawled Seth. "I'm fed up on all this brawling. This happens to be *my* home too. Shut up, both of you, and let me say something, will you?"

They both stopped and looked at him.

"Now with this guy, Barnard, here, I can prove my point," said Burp suddenly, before Seth could

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open his mouth again. "In your case, your mind being slightly more complex, prediction is difficult, I admit. But Barnard is so simple-minded that in relation to him prediction is as easy as foretelling that a train will reach a depot which is on the lines ahead of it. For instance—"

He grabbed a pencil and a pad from the bureau, scribbled rapidly, and passed the pad to Arthur.

Seth watched him irately, then turned abruptly toward the door.

"Where are you going, Seth?" said Arthur.

"To the composing room. I'll say what I have to say in print."

Arthur read out from the pad: "As you read this, Barnard will be on his way to the composing room to insert some unflattering remarks about me in his article, because that will be his response to my (a) frustrating his desire to speak (b) describing him as simple-minded in the extreme."

Seth glowered, and sat down on the nearest chair and folded his arms.

"You're wrong, you see. I'm not going."

"Read on," said Burp.

Arthur read: "When you've read the first sentence of this to him, his response will be not to budge after all, to show that he is not a robot but has an independent will."

"Now I *am* going," said Seth, grimly, and went.

WHEN he returned after about an hour's work, the storm had abated. All was quiet in the lounge. Burp was sitting in an armchair reading a book at a great pace—turning a page every four or five seconds—and Arthur was standing moodily looking out of the window, drumming with his fingers on the ledge.

"What's the matter, Arthur—expecting someone?" said Seth.

"I was," grunted Arthur.

"Perhaps now you'll allow me to say my little piece," said Seth. "I should like—"

"Hah!" shouted Burp, suddenly sitting bolt upright and slamming the book down. "Revolts! Utterly *revolts!*" he yelled, with his eyes popping out of his primrose face. "*Revolts!*" he screamed, and burst into wild, hysterical sobs, clutching his head.

"What the—" said Arthur.

"He seems to have struck a stimulus," said Seth. "I'd better get him another sort of stimulant."

He popped across the street to Ted's Bar, and returned with a bottle of Scotch. Burp was huddled in the armchair crying quietly to himself.

Arthur was examining a page of the open book. "I don't get it," he said, looking at the title on the spine, and returning to study the page. "*The Murder of Edgar Allen Poe* by J.A.T. Lloyd. Page two-hundred-and-ten . . . Ah, this is

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it."

Seth set a full tumbler on the arm of the chair beside Burp, and went over to see what Arthur meant. Arthur pointed to the passage where Poe exclaimed, with a look of "scornful pride": "My whole nature utterly *revolts* at the idea that there is any Being in the Universe superior to *myself!*"

"That's funny, Arthur," said Seth. "That's what you're always saying."

"Rubbish!" said Arthur. "Why, I shouldn't even consider such a crazy idea for a moment, let alone allow myself to be revolted by it. I just *know* there isn't—"

"I must say that Earth produces remarkably fine alcohol," said the calm, appreciative voice of Burp. He was sitting up, sipping, and looking as if he were enjoying life.

"Well, well," said Seth. "And I must say that you produce some remarkably quick change, Burp,"

"I expect the workings of a free mind *must* seem remarkable to robots with fixed chains of ideas," said Burp, complacently. "You see, *you* can't select *your* ideas: they're all bound to one another by chains of association. You can't think of a hamburger, for example, without also thinking of a perspiring canine, which in turn is associated with a cold cat, and so on. You cannot separate and isolate your ideas, because your minds produce chains of ideas as a sausage-machine produces chains of sausages, linked together. In fact, a sausage-machine is a very good analogy of your type of brain, because it *is* only a machine. Whereas mine is not, and can deal with thoughts totally distinct from, and unconnected with, one another. Thus, I can change my moods at will, unlike you, who are slaves to—"

"I can't stand any more of it!" Seth shrieked suddenly, marched to the door, and returned bearing the big buff envelope.

He gave the envelope to Arthur. "I deliver him into your hands, Arthur. Don't spare him."

ARTHUR peeped inside the envelope.

Burp watched him curiously. "What's all this?"

Arthur said: "Burp, why didn't you eat those steaks at lunch today?"

"I wasn't hungry."

"You never are," said Arthur. "And you never will be, with an inside like this."

And he whipped out the big X-ray negative from the envelope and held it up. It showed an intricate mesh of cog-wheels, coils, containers, springs, pipes, and apparatus for which there was no name.

Burp's lower lip drooped. He looked like a baby from under which Messrs. Watson, Lecky and Company had whipped the blanket.

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"Oh! You know!" he wailed, thinly and petulantly. He collapsed back in his chair, sniffing miserably.

"I was suspicious from the first," said Arthur. "When my compass needle started playing tricks, and I noticed it was being affected by your movements. It was trying to follow you. Not merely because of the mass of steel in you, but also because of the amount of electricity being generated in you. You're fuelled by alcohol, aren't you?—hence the continual injections of whiskey. How is the energy extracted from the alcohol and transformed into electrical energy?"

"Only a human could be so indelicate at a time like this," moaned Burp.

"It doesn't matter. I'll probably work it out from this—diagram. It's strange, Burp, that you're a mechanical man and yet not a bit mechanical-minded. You're full of theoretical knowledge, but practically you know nothing. That was quite an inspiration of mine when I saw the Doc going to the Bar, and caught him, and told him about you, and conspired with him to inveigle you to the Hospital."

"Only a human could be so treacherous," sniffed Burp.

Arthur went on: "It was quite plain when we were showing you the clinical apparatus that you couldn't tell one thing from another. You didn't even know that when you were standing between the two screens, and we were kidding you that it was a thing for sunray treatment, that we were actually taking an X-ray photograph of you."

"Even on Mars there is no one quite so low and deceitful as you," mumbled Burp.

"Oh, you wonderful Martians, who know everything! You're all just robots, aren't you?"

Burp was silent.

"Aren't you?" Arthur's voice was like a whip-crack. He was playing attorney for the prosecution, and enjoying every second of it.

"Yes," blurted Burp.

"That's a lie," said Arthur, quietly, toying with his victim. "You're a robot, certainly, but you're not a Martian. You're merely a mechanical servant of the real Martians."

Burp seemed to wither and shrink even more, and Seth began to feel sorry for him.

"Model Mark B.VII" Burp muttered, despairingly.

"And," continued Arthur, "you've developed a mechanical fault, causing instability—'hunting,' as you like to call it—which has produced an effect akin to paranoia. If you were human, we'd call you a cyclothyme, too."

"Hey, how do you know all this?" asked Seth.

"Inference," said Arthur, shortly. "The way he kept desperately trying to prove that we were only

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machines, while he was something superior. There was something obviously pathological in his overanxiety to make that point. The way he went off the handle each time I spoke to him in a way that reminded him of a Martian addressing him—"

"I hate them! I hate them!" cried Burp. "They would never treat me as if I were a man too. I am! I am! I have feelings, too. I have ideas of my own — grand ideas! They would never let me try to explain them. They always said: 'I know just what you're going to say, so keep quiet, keep your place. You're only a machine. We know all your ideas, because we put them into you. You don't have to bore us with all that old stuff.' And they would point their robot-control tubes at me and make me dumb."

Seth was going to say " 'Dumb's' the word," but the words stuck in his throat, and instead he said: "Leave him alone, Arthur, he's had a pretty raw deal."

"And he's got a pretty raw inferiority complex from it, for which he over-compensates to the point of mania. Did you notice how it got touched off when he stumbled on that sentence of Poe's? Poe, of course, was another—"

"All right, Arthur, let up," said Seth. "He's had enough."

"I want only one more admission from him, and that I'm determined to have," said Arthur grimly. "Burp, that story you told about our being robots left here on Earth by the Martians a million years ago was another load of hooey, wasn't it?"

"Yes," whispered Burp. "I made it up. I . . . ran away from Mars to find someplace where *I* could be the boss and give the orders. I thought, in a small hick-town like this, there wouldn't be any opposition."

Arthur gave a bark of triumphant, Mephistophelian laughter, and said: "You picked the wrong place. No one tells me what to do."

"It's strange," Seth mused, "but the victim of a bully always seems to get a yen to act just like the bully."

"Not strange at all," said Arthur. "Just the normal psychological reaction."

Burp got up slowly, picking up the bottle of Scotch by its neck, and went toward the door. He looked like a bent, old man.

"Where are you going?" asked Seth.

Burp paused. He said, in a defeated tone: "I'm going to look for some other place to live. Somewhere where perhaps there are nice people who will treat me with respect. I couldn't stay in Peterville —after all this."

He slouched out. Through the window, they watched him take the dusty road heading out of the

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town. Impulsively, Seth opened the window and shouted after him: "Want a lift?"

Burp turned, shaking his head. "No. I don't want to see either of you again . . . Goodbye. Thanks for the Scotch."

He turned again and plodded on, presently becoming a small speck in the distance.

BUT Burp must have got a lift somewhere on the road, for it was only an hour later when there was a distant roar and they rushed to the window to see the tiny splinter which was the rocket mounting the sky on a pillar of white gas. It went up and up, leaving only a twisted, darkening trail.

"Bon voyage!" said Seth. "As he said he only uses the rocket to travel distances of more than a million miles, I guess he won't be looking for any more suckers on this planet. Arthur, you shouldn't have frightened him off. We might have learned something of scientific value from him.'"

Arthur snorted. "Not him! I always knew exactly what he was going to say . . . H'm. I see he's left his little gadget behind."

He picked up the robot-control tube, which had fallen down behind the bureau, and began fiddling with it.

"Oh, well, that's something to remember him by," said Seth. "I suppose it's no use my waiting any longer for you to start tidying up all this assorted literature you and he have decorated the room with?"

Arthur didn't answer, and with a sigh, Seth went around picking up and piling the books. As he picked up Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics,* he heard *click-click* and then he had a queer impulse to place the volume on his head and mince around the room like a pupil practicing deportment. He obeyed the impulse.

"Hah!" said Arthur. "Then it *does* work."

He was pointing the tube at Seth.

Seth wanted to yell "Switch it off!" but his jaws seemed to be held in an unseen vise. He continued, against his will, to parade up and down absurdly, balancing the book on his crown. Then *click-click* sounded again, and he was released.

"Very interesting," said Arthur, dodging as *Cybernetics* flew past his ear. He waited patiently until Seth had exhausted his breath, his rage, and his Army vocabulary. "A wire had come off a terminal, that was all. Nothing to it. Yet that robot fiddled with it for hours and couldn't see it. Can you imagine such a hopelessly unpractical creature?"

"My imagination's working on other things right now," said Seth, breathlessly. "If you ever do that again—!"

Then something occurred to him. "Holy Pete, do you realize what

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it means? I'm a robot!"

"I've always thought so," said Arthur.

"And you are, too."

"Nonsense!" said Arthur, loudly. "I've disproved all that."

"Just think of the power this gives us! We could run Peterville completely. I could make Judge Aldley eat out of my hand—literally. Why, we could run the world!"

"Exactly," said Arthur. "But this thing wants one more slight adjustment first."

He picked up a lead paperweight from the bureau and hit the robot-control a smashing blow with it. The tube had been made of something as brittle as plastic and far more friable. It fell into small, powdery pieces.

"Oh," said Seth, shocked. "What did you do that for?"

"We've had enough paranoia around here for one day. I like Peterville as it is. I won't have it turned into a marionette town. I like people to act the way they want to, even if I agree with none of them. If everybody agrees with me, and does exactly what I tell them to, who am I going to fight with? Do you want to make this *really* a dead town?"

"Sorry, Arthur," said Seth. "And thank you."

Arthur said: "That's all right. I'm like that. The dopes who live here don't think I care about them or anyone else but myself. That's all right. They're entitled to think, even though they're wrong."

"And all the time, underneath, you have a heart of gold."

"I don't boast about it," said Arthur.

"Of course not . . . By the way, supposing someone else had got hold of that thing and used it on *you?*"

"It wouldn't have worked," said Arthur. "No one can tell *me* what to do."

"You didn't smash it to keep anyone from trying?" asked Seth, innocently.

"Don't be a complete idiot, man!" said Arthur, very loudly indeed. "Don't talk such utter nonsense."

"Sorry," said Seth, gently. "I can't help myself. I'm only a robot."

THE END

SPECIAL NOTICE

Due to the war situation and slow paper deliveries KINSMEN OF THE DRAGON will not be available until the Christmas Season. In the meantime, order your copy *now* so that you will be among the first to receive the book.

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LETTERS (*Continued from page* 101)

of the country, pulps have lost ground. From the 10c or 15c of a decade ago, magazines have increased to 25c and even 35c as a selling price and I'm sure Mr. X would not consider them able to pay the rates of the slick magazines which have such phenomenal advertising and circulation revenues.

When the average American goes to the magazine stand he buys what he wants be it comic book, pocket-book, science fiction etc. No one holds a gun to his head. Now there is much on the stands that I dislike but I think enough of my fellow citizens to allow them to buy what they want. If readers dislike reprint magazines they will rapidly show this. Personally I think reprints make available to new readers at low cost stories which either by reason of cost or rarity have been unobtainable.

In '51, close to $50 will be required to buy every issue of every science fiction magazine. In this highly competitive situation the top magazines will have to give their readers top *stories*, top illustrations, great distinctive makeup in order to stay in business. Sloppy makeup, poor illustrations, imbecilic stories will have to go.

More good writing is necessary and the authors just aren't around to do it. So Mr. X if it comes to buying a well written reprint or a poorly written original, you can guess which one I shall buy. Since you have used the same reasons as most professional writers I shall use their glib reply to anyone complaining about the lack of markets—a well written story *will eventually* find a market.

31 N. Aberdeen St.
Chicago 7, Ill.

Bergman

For reprints consider this. I doubt if there are any of us fans who have—or have read—all the s.f. stories that have been printed. Sure, we'd like to buy them, but old original copies are hard to find and harder to buy. Well, why not buy books? This idea even OW fosters, from your ad of your book shop. Again dinero. I don't think too many of the fans can afford to buy lots of books any more than this feller can, especially at 3 bucks a book. That sum will buy 12 sf mags. I've lots of gripes against reprint mags too, but as long as they help build up my collection of otherwise unattainable stories, I'll buy 'em.

Las Vegas
New Mexico

It would seem that most readers are in favor of magazines on the order of FFM and FN, both of which print stories that are now hard to obtain; as for other magazines, both new and reprint, the main qualification is GOOD material—so we'll do our best to give you stories that are both new and good! —Ed.

Jan Romanoff

One of the many outstanding things about OW is the fine cover. It's hard to find a mag with both a good cover and fine stories. Yours is well on the way.

I am glad to see that you recognize, instead of ignoring or refusing to believe the fact, that there are other stf mags. It's silly for a mag to forbid the mention of a competitor's name. Everybody knows that they're there, and reads them besides.

A Man Named Mars: This one was swell reading all the way down the line. I suspect that Steber is a pen name, but I couldn't swear to it.

Venus Trouble: One dozen roses to you for the sequel to Venus Trouble Shooter. I liked this one best. Wonderful characterization.

By the Rules: By far the best in the dish. The thing I liked most about this one was the way the author had Kiv inserted in the story.

Holes in my Head: A fine story by one of my favorite authors. As

(*Continued on page* 161)

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GLASS WOMAN OF VENUS

By G. H. Irwin

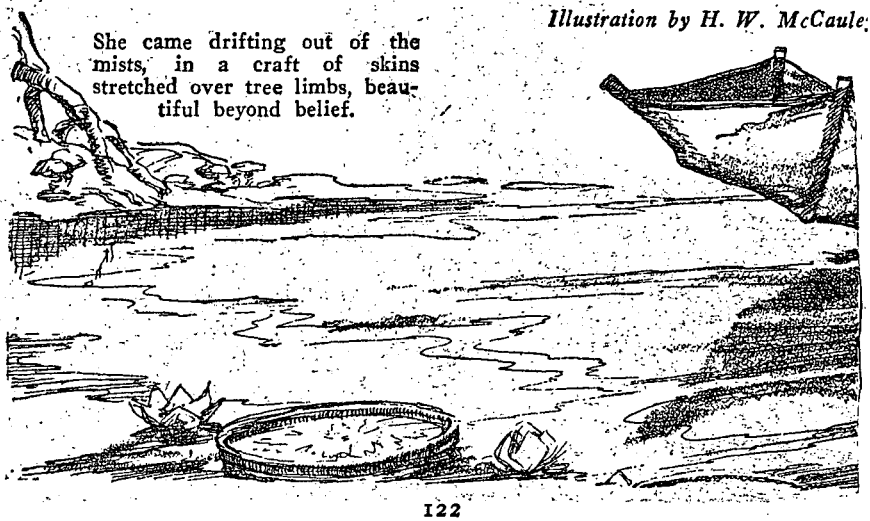
Once more Frank Farar plunged into the weird jungles of Venus on a strange quest—a woman whose body was transparent as glass! But he didn't bargain on the monster that pursued her.

HE came in from the night like the ghost of the jungle itself, with the scent of forest and river and swamp still with him. He put up his guns, changed his clothes, ate, and sat silent, with some inner dream of his journey through the mystery swamps of Venus clouding his eyes.

We made ready to spend most of the night talking, for we knew Frank Farar and how he hungered for his own humankind, after one of his hunts. Janey, my wife, got out her hidden blackberry wine and packed the kids off to bed in spite of their protests — we could tell Farar was not in any mood to be pestered with questions by our three youngsters.

I knew why Frank had come. I had been wanting to see him on a very important matter, and that weird telepathic yarva talk by the greenies had reached him. Here he was, but I could tell by his manner

Illustration by H. W. McCauley



She came drifting out of the mists, in a craft of skins stretched over tree limbs, beautiful beyond belief.

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that my inadvertent summons had jerked him away from something more absorbing than any of his former hunts.

This night, it started when Janey asked him, "When are you going to take a rocket to Earth and find yourself a wife?" She was joking, of course, for somehow the idea of Frank with a wife was quite unimaginable. I hadn't told Janey that the scheduled rocket from Earth had not arrived this time, but she probably knew—she heard quite as much native yarva talk as Frank himself. Frank had probably picked up the news and tucked it away for future examination. In the introspective state he was in, I guessed he had not given the non-arrival of the Earth-rocket serious attention as yet. But I was perhaps the only human on Venus who really knew how terrible the situation on Earth had become. And the greenies for some reason do not yarva me easily.

Frank always pretended to envy Janey and myself our wedded bliss and our three chubby kids. Tonight, he gravely explained to Janey why he never married . . .

"You see, Janey, I fell in love with a woman in the rain forest, one time. She wouldn't go my way, and I couldn't go hers. Since then, I haven't wanted any other woman."

Janey, suspecting one of his taller types of yarns, only made a wry face and settled down to be ribbed a little. Frank liked to fool her into believing something he told because she would check his mind with her yarva sensing; and he *could* fool her because he had an unusual facility with yarva, raised the way he was. Then he would laugh at her for being fooled when she should have seen through the tale. She was sure of it when he started off:

"She wasn't like you, Janey. She was a native of Venus, all right, but she was no greenie. She didn't have a froggy odor, though her fingers were slightly webbed. She was plumb beautiful, even if you could see right through her! Yes—she was a transparent woman! As transparent as glass.

"She just wasn't the type for marrying. How could a transparent woman hide anything from a husband? And how could a woman be happy if she couldn't keep a secret from her husband?"

Janey sniffed.

"Still, you fell in love with her?" I prompted, needing a laugh as much as Frank did. But I sensed something behind the seemingly silly tale.

Janey poured tumblers of wine, and sat sipping, measuring Frank with her eyes, and looking somehow a little frightened, as if she hoped what she saw in his mind wasn't really there. I wondered what it was that scared her; it

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didn't show on Frank's face.

Janey had always preferred Frank to any of our other friends, and it would have been nice if he had married and settled down near the mine compound. Not that you could ever expect Frank to live inside the shell over the mine compound. He hated the plastic things, hated the shut-in feeling, hated the very safety they gave. He thought like a greenie, from being with them so much.

"Why couldn't you marry her, really?" asked Janey, to fill the silence.

FARAR talked on absently, and we both knew he was listening to something far-off, some distant mutter of meaning in the wild jungle night. "Well, she *was* green, but that was no objection. Her people wouldn't *let* her go. She was a medicine woman, taboo in certain ways. To have her, I had to join up and be a . . . member! Peculiar, ancient people, the last of a great nation, hiding in the ruins . . . not for me!"

I couldn't knock the conversational ball around any more. I had to ask:

"Have you heard about Earth?"

He came out of it then. His eyes lost that listening absent look. The jungle that had come in with him receded again to the background. "Yes, Hal, I know. The natives don't miss anything as big as that. They've known from the first, and they pity us. Did you ever think you'd be pitied by a greenie?"

I chuckled, a ghostly little sound in the unnatural night. The lights of our living room, the plastic shell high overhead, the guns, the throb of machinery in the mine weren't succeeding, tonight, in keeping Venus out.

"I always thought they pitied us, Frank."

"They know the rocket didn't come on schedule. I heard them discussing it. They know about the plague, and they hope the rocket never comes, because it might bring the plague to them. They know what we think the Earth plague would do to them if it got loose here on Venus. That talk of theirs as I came in is what sent my mind back to the glass woman, the medicine woman. I was trying to remember some of the things she told me and showed me. Some pretty wonderful things. She just might be able to help us."

"Tell us about her," ordered Janey, curling up at my knee like the kid she really was. I got keyed up to hear about the glass woman myself; the way Janey was reaching into his mind I knew it was something very different.

Frank leaned back, and stretched out his long green-leathered legs. The fringed greenie moccasins on his feet were a different style than I remembered, and even his soft

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gray leather shirt was trimmed in a bead style I had never seen before. I wondered where he had been this time, but didn't ask, knowing he would tell me in due time.

"Well, she was shaped like a Grecian sculpture. Hal, but she was transparent as glass. More like green Jello, only that doesn't convey the real beauty of her . . . All her veins and organs were visible inside, and they were different from an Earth human's, probably different from the greenies too—I should know more about anatomy. In a bright light you could see right through her, see the blood move and pulse, the heart beat, and it was indescribably beautiful. In a dim light she looked as solid as anyone. I loved her, and that made things especially fine, of course. But there was another thing . . ." He fell silent, listened afar off again, and we waited till he stopped listening.

Then I laughed, figuring Frank was stringing out his ribbing for Janey's benefit, pretending not to notice she was yarvaing him, and making up a whopping big pretense in his mind which she would take for Gospel truth. He could do it, too. He had, more than once.

I lit my pipe, grinning at the pair of them fighting out their silent battle of mind searching, and said, "You may get Janey to believe that—she doesn't know quite as much about physiology and zoology and such things as a college product. But remember I went to school on Earth, and there ain't no such animal."

Frank fumbled out his own pipe. He always waited till I lit mine, probably reading Janey's permission in her mind, or seeing that she didn't like the smoke and figuring that if she could stand my pipe she wouldn't mind his too.

"Hal, I didn't expect you to believe me. Remember I never told you about the winged monster of the Swamp of Despair. I waited till you saw and heard it yourself. You thought I went along to find platinum. I was really hunting the monster all the time, and you furnished the means."

"There's no such thing as a transparent woman!"

FRANK puffed up his pipe, his eyes on mine giving me that little tingle that told me there was peril so close that he couldn't talk about it—just like he used to do when the giant water snakes would ease up to the canoe and try to come aboard.

"Hal, there are dozens of transparent animals in nature. Jellyfish, one-celled animals, lots of things. But this woman belongs to a human race that developed along a side-track somewhere along the road of evolution. They went on getting human, but they retained the original transparent flesh. There

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are quite a lot of them. I have some photographs I never showed to you because there's a certain sentiment attached. Besides, I knew the best way to keep their secret was to keep it to myself. They don't want contact with other people, and I think they're right. They are too different! The old hatred of the alien would cause them trouble . . . "

I watched as he took a little packet from his belt pouch and handed it to Janey. I asked, "Then why show them now, Frank?"

His eyes were bleak on mine, and I knew the answer. Their welfare couldn't be considered before that of Earth men, and Earth was being wiped out by a plague. Something that strange Venusian woman had told him made him believe they had the cure for the plague, the cure that had eluded all of Earth's vaunted medical resources.

I asked again, for I could never get used to picking my answer out of the air like a person does when yarva sensitives are around.

"Why show them, Frank? It might get out, get to some of the nosey scientific societies, or to some grab-all corporation . . . "

Janey handed me the photographs, one by one, as she examined them. They were ordinary snaps, a woman standing beside two men, three kids in the background. It looked like double exposure, you could see the outlines of trees right through the people.

They were very handsome people. Not dressed like greenies in a gee-string and a knife, they wore feather rings at the knees, and beads and armlets, and a tall headdress. One carried a weapon I recognized as the progenitor of the Carian needle gun. These were people still possessing some of the civilization of the Venus that had once existed, the cultured world of long ago.

"Nice looking," I said, handing back the snaps.

Frank wrapped them up and put them away. He sat looking into the aquarium, watching our pin-striped plupy battling the alligator moth-wing.

"I stayed with them for months, Hal. I love those people. I learned a lot. I hate to take a chance on the publicity that might get out about them. Some of the greenies gossip and listen . . . right now, they may be telling it."

Janey cocked her head, smiled at Frank. "No one's listening—I can tell."

Frank shook his head. "Things always get out, on Venus, unless you go underground where yarva can't spy you out. That's where *they* live."

I got impatient. "Frank, you're nervous. Too much jungle, too much watching for danger. Forget it and relax."

He did relax, and grinned, agree-

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ing with me. "When I got better acquainted with them, they showed me a lot of things they saved from the past. Some of the things were ancient records of their science, and some of the records were medical case histories. She read them to me, yarva style, you know how. Some of those diseases they used to fight resembled the present plague on Earth. It's even possible it was taken back to Earth in some specimen or other, who knows? It's like nothing ever seen on Earth before."

Janey got to her feet, started off toward the supply room door. I called after her. "What do you want in there this time of night?"

Her answer came back full of that determination I had always admired, even when it pushed me to efforts I would never have made on my own.

"I'm going to check my pack, and yours. I know what's coming, and this time you're not leaving yours truly home with the kiddies. Mrs. Beacham can take care of the house for once. She's offered to, often enough. We've got things to do!"

VENUS, in this year 2024, contained around ten thousand men and a few hundred women of Earth origin. Mostly they worked for the refineries or in the mines. Their living conditions were good, but they were confined to the plastic shells of the mine villages because of the venomous and carnivorous life of the planet.

On the fringe of this strictly confined population moved a dozen intrepid souls who dared to brave the jungles and rivers and far-looming mountains. These were for the most part descendants of the first trippers. Many of them were pretty low in the social scale, living with greenie women in their tree huts and refraining from all useful effort. They were the only men on Venus, however, who knew the planet well enough to get around with a reasonable degree of safety.

There were very few men indeed like Frank Farar who really liked the rivers and swamps and who felt at home and safe in the terrible forests. Even the greenies themselves weren't over-anxious to enter some of the places that Farar reveled in exploring. There were things Farar knew about Venus that the greenies of the villages didn't know! There was only one thing the native people could do that Farar couldn't do better. That was to breathe under water. They were amphibians, with webbed hands and feet, and knew just as much of the geography of the bottoms of their seas and mighty rivers as they did about the river banks and mountains. But the swamps, for the most part, they left pretty much alone. They lived elsewhere, for a number of reasons. And a lot of the land area of Venus is trackless, impene-

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trable swamp.

* * *

HER skin was a soft translucent green, and inside her semi-transparent form could be seen the little curlicues of veins and transparent nerve endings in visibly minute complexity. She was beautiful in the way that tooled crystal is beautiful, the little lines of inner fiber making an interior design of extreme grace all through her. She was like a transparent microscopic animal, stained green on the micro-slide, and then enlarged into the macro world.

She parted the tall reeds and peered out wistfully, warily, over the wide, gray river, watching the mighty strength of it swirling on and on. Down stream approached a far-off canoe, and she must know what it contained. Intently she waited, until the four in the canoe became visible. Then silently she slipped away, unseen by the travelers.

* * *

WITH Farar in the bow of the big outrigger dug-out was a greenie guide, an old friend of his, brought along for no real need but to make the upstream paddling less arduous for Hal and Janey Worran. Frank always stroked the bow, with his guns in easy reach, ready to knock off any obstreperous reptile that decided the craft meant a meal. The river contained some monsters, and one was sure of a water reptile attack two or three times a day.

"Worran and Farar" spelled the name of one of the wealthiest mining outfits on Venus, since our mutual discovery of a platinum lode four years before. But Frank prefered the danger and the thrills of jungle exploration to sitting at home within the mining compound's plastic shell poring over account books. So I had to take care of the business. Janey, who had been raised by the "brownies" as we called the little dwellers in the uninhabitable Swamp of Despair, also prefered the wilds to the village compounds, but she had her children and her home to care for.

This time, we both declared a vacation, to accompany Frank on a trip to learn if the certain native race of his acquaintance had or had not the cure for a disease that was decimating earth. The thermo-plastic roof over our mine and village might keep out heat, insects, greenies and disease—but it also kept out adventure. Neither I nor my wife could endure it for a permanent existence. Not with Farar beckoning, with rifle and pack and canoe.

Wide as the Amazon of Earth, this river Granlee was as sluggish, as titantic in its strength. In flood time, twice a year, it became a veritable inland sea.

Our dug-out was a slender trunk of the native cypress, hollowed out by the greenies with fire and stone-axe. It was nicely balanced, and

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Frank had attached his own improvement, a demountable outrigger. Our baggage was an irreducible minimum, sixty-pound packs, forty for Janey, and the rifles and ammunition. Even so, we did not mean to carry packs for any distance.

Farar was able to live off the country if need be, traveling through the forests with only frying pan, rifle and salt and flour. But we *could* carry all our gear if anything happened to the canoe. The packs contained prospecting equipment, microscopes, containers for specimens, fishing tackle and spear heads. The spear heads were for gifts to greenie friends we might meet—to make sure of their friendliness. A fish spear of steel is the greenie idea of the perfect gift. We used them ourselves for about half our meals, spearing them out of the river and into the pan, literally.

Old Doc Allen, also a zoologist and the man who had helped develop Frank into a jungle expert from his lonely orphaned boyhood, had approved all our equipment and given suggestions how to check the medicine woman's information as to the plague cure.

Past us swept the mighty current, dotted here and there with the snout of a curious reptile, round as a keg—a keg set with glittering pointed teeth and tiny golden eyes. They were the chief peril of river travel, both insatiably curious and without fear, being nearly supreme in their element. The Hory birds swooped and screamed, but never attacked, though they were big enough to have made an attack a serious problem. They sometimes attacked greenie canoes, but had never been known to dive on a man from Earth—the smell was too alien. The distant banks, only one of which was ever visible, were always half-hidden by the ever-present river mist.

To myself, this mist typified the terrific lure of the rivers of Venus, for the mighty boles of the virgin forest trees were never quite completely visible, nor the lurking shadows ever quite anything but a mysterious promise of peril, not defined, not immediate, but always waiting to be uncovered. When the occasional sunburst did break through the cloud layer long enough to dispel the mists for a time and the forest titans reared their majestic beauty in sudden naked splendor, when the mists drained away and parted, dissolving to reveal completely the life surprised at the loss of the ever-present hiding mists, beauty and terror and peril were then completely seen, but something of the keen attraction of Venusian travel was lost by the revealment.

I would not love Venus half so much if I could always see it clearly. For Venus has always that lure

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that beautiful women know so well, their beauty unadorned is never quite so completely overwhelming as when partially hidden. Venus had always that perfect lure of mysterious beauty. One was always waiting for a glimpse of the perfections only half revealed by the misty fripperies with which Venus adorns herself.

On Venus, when one bids goodbye to a friend, it is always to see his figure drift into invisibility in the mist. And when he comes again, it is striding suddenly out of the mist, magically present all at once. So is Venus always full of sudden exhilarating surprise, always pregnant with wonder about to burst upon one out of the wall of warm, gray fog.

JANEY and Frank and I had discussed this subtle attraction of Venus, and I think we all felt the same about it. Surely no other river on another world could ever promise so much and hide so much.

Mornings and evenings the fog thickens, settles down close about one, and it gives a feeling of security to an old resident— no promenading peril can spy you out for possible prey in the fog. I think the common faculty for *yarva* sensing was developed among Venusians because of the fog. Certainly greenies would never find each other's villages without yarva to guide them.

At high noon the fog thins to a luminous all-pervading whiteness, coloring all things, making every beautiful line a ghost filled with some ethereal essence, outlining all shapes with its own rich quality. This ever-changing, never-changing fog and mist is the characteristic Venusian background to which one grows accustomed and does not note except as the background. One's nose serves as an eye quite often, bringing scent of places and creatures before the eye perceives and to those to whom the yarva faculty is second nature, I have been told the eye-mindedness of Earth thinking is as alien as Chinese to a citizen of Brooklyn.

So it is that Venusian natives see with their nose and hear with their mind, sensing thoughts about them before their eye registers even a hint. They smell and they hear and they think of things they have smelled and heard with their yarva sense that they have never seen with their eyes. To Janey and Farar, raised among natives, all this was accepted and understood as the nature of life. To me, raised on Earth, this business of sensing others' thought when I could not even see them, of smelling out danger when my ears heard not a sound, when my eyes detected not a change in the luminous curtain of light about, was never accepted as quite natural. I was always an alien, on an alien world, troubled because my senses

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were not built to cope with the hiding mist. Always a fish out of water, depending upon others like a blind man. Yet I had learned to love it, had learned to get along as does a blind man, by leaning on my companions' more able senses. It is probable that I enjoyed this voyage up the River of Doubt in search of a transparent race more than my companions, because I was so much more conscious of the peril and power and mysterious might of the river Granlee.

QUITE suddenly *she* appeared out of that mist, guiding with one small paddle her cockleshell of skins stretched over the bent limbs of trees, using the current to come down upon us. I gasped, for she was quite as beautiful as Farar had intimated—much more so, in fact. Farar was no judge of Earth women—no man raised on Venus has much opportunity for contact with them, there are so few. This woman would have won a beauty contest back on Earth hands down.

Farar's usually somewhat grim face became wreathed in a grin, his brown leather cheeks pinked with the first blush I had ever seen on him. The woman grasped the paddle tip he stretched to her with one graceful hand, and suddenly the last of the mist veils dropped from her and she was beside us, her hand on the wale, the two craft gently heaving together. So does Venus ever spring its surprises, terror or beauty; and this was beauty suddenly born out of the mist even as was the planet's name-sake.

A single curling plume of the Venusian purple egret nodded over her graceful head, the softly curling hair of her blond mane was shoulder length, and emeralds and rubies were glittering among the mass of bright hair. Her eyes were very pale and uncomfortably direct, and in this light her transparency was a quality that kept me gasping, every glance revealing some new inner beauty I had never known existed within the flesh.

Janey was fascinated, and she and Frank were both gone into that trance of close yarva - talk from which I was excluded. I put my head close to Janey's and listened, and my weak telepathic senses revealed the interchange of rhythmic chanting meanings, something like listening to "Beowulf" when you couldn't quite make out the words—you got the thrill of it, but not the exact shades of the word meanings. I knew that in a few minutes they would all know everything necessary about each other's presence here. I knew that somehow this woman had heard the yarva-talk passed across the miles, come to greet us and guide us. There was welcome in her eyes and in the gestures of her hands, and inwardly I put Farar down as a

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simpleton where women were concerned to pass up this creature because she was "not his kind."

Somewhere far off a drummer-bird banged its great horned head against a hollow tree, and the echoes rolled and rolled like distant thunder. As if at a signal, the trance of the three in close yarva broke up, and the greenie in the bow turned his head and gravely winked at me. I knew what he meant, that this meeting between "the hunter" and the "taboo woman" was filled with more possibilities than can be classed under strictly business. I winked back, and he plunged his paddle in, waited for me to catch his stroke. Again the paddles dripped and dipped, and the medicine woman of the Fenirdren released our craft. Her own light bubble of skin darted ahead, stayed there in front of us, her back and shoulders and long glass-like arms pure poetry in motion.

I looked at Janey, hoping she would relate the substance of their interchange, but her eyes mocked me mischievously. She knew very well I was slightly smitten by the woman's unexpected beauty, and Janey was punishing me for thinking someone else attractive. Yarva has its disadvantages, too!

WE paddled on, as usual myself the only one who didn't know exactly what was forward. I sighed. At last Farar spoke to me: "She's asking *us* for help, Hal, instead of the other way around. I made a deal with her. I'll help kill off their vermin if they'll let us have the cure to the plague. I'm pretty sure she knows the disease, from the old records if not from present-day incidence. If she doesn't, I can't read her mind rightly."

"Kill off what vermin?" I asked, disappointed to have him bring all the wonder and bright speculation in my mind down to reality—the reality of a job of killing off rats. But Farar was always the realist.

"It might mean saving mankind," murmured Farar, not answering my question. "It doesn't look like they're going to stop it."

From what I had heard of the progress of the strange new plague on Earth, if we stopped to do a pied-piper act there might not be any mankind left to save. I said so, in a grumbling monotone, knowing they would hear it with their minds if not their ears.

Farar rebuked me, saying: "This race is fighting for their lives, too, Hal. They are only asking the gift of survival in return for the same thing. You can't blame them."

Exasperated, I bellowed: "Against what, for Pete's sake! Can't you remember I can't hear yarva?"

Farar grinned, he loved to get me riled. "If there was a word for it, I'd tell you. It's a kind of intelligent snake-mole with a hundred legs, as big as a python. They live

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in their own system of caverns. They bore through solid rocks with their snouts, and they love to drag the Fenir-dren into their hidey-holes. Do you begin to get the picture?"

I grunted, trying to visualize the thing. I didn't succeed. I asked grumpily, "How do they kill 'em?"

"They don't, that's why they wanted 'the hunter.' When I was here before, they had patched up some kind of truce with the things. But somebody accidentally broke into one of their sacred caves, and it all started up again."

"Very clear," I growled. "Intelligent centipedes like moles only they're like snakes with legs and they have sacred caves and eat transparent people. Only on Venus . . . "

"Could it be!" finished Janey. "But it is, and they need us, and we ought to be able to find an answer for them when the fate of our mother world depends on it."

The glass woman had dropped down with the current and Farar was holding our craft with one hand while she pointed with her paddle at some thing I couldn't even see beyond the mist. I suppose some distant member of her race was sending a picture of something and they were looking at it with yarva while to me there was nothing to see but the wall of bright mist. Quite suddenly the mist darkened abruptly and I knew the sun was sinking, invisible and yet vast beyond some far mountain, snow-capped and tremendous on the unseen horizon. The imagination learns to work on Venus, and I was pretty sure that my imagination was often actual perception, but not yet certain. When you are always certain, then you have become yarva-minded, and the so-called imagination tells you the truth of things, instead of a fancy lie.

Janey murmured softly in my ear, and I slipped an arm about her little waist, needing her, glad she was along. Just ahead a great water beast surged titanically, sending a shower of spray over us, and none of us paid any attention. It was a *formont,* which is the largest and most timid of creatures on the planet. We knew it by the sound of its blowing, by the feel of its vastness in the waves washing past us. It's the quick, silent things you fear on the river, not the noisy ones.

"There are a dozen of their ancient cities nearby, Hal. I wish you could see them. They're showing them to us with unison yarva. She's pointing out the direction of each one to Frank. They must have been a beautiful race when they were on top! Sprang from a spore of the normal opaque race, I suppose the Doc would say. They are like no other race in their transparency, and they have inherited a culture

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distinct from all others on the planet, having always been taboo because of their difference."

"DO they live in their ruins, Janey?" I asked, abject as a blind man at all this passing just beyond my reach.

"Mostly underneath, because they can't stand staying on the surface a lot. Light affects them too much. You can see their bodies wouldn't have much strength against strong light. Once Venus was different, the fog thicker, then the surface cities were built. They have a legend that once Venus drifted in darkness, without a sun, and was captured by the sun out of space. Their legend tells them they are the oldest race, the original human of this world, and that the others sprang from their seed after the sun came into the skies. The others' opacity is a built-up defense against the sun, and their own transparence was preserved because they moved underground—so runs their legend. But like all legends, they aren't sure."

"Thanks, Janey." I was full of gratitude for learning even this much of all I knew she had learned about these hidden people in that all-revealing close-yarva trance she had gone into with the medicine woman of the Fenir-dren.

A sudden idea struck me, and I exclaimed too loudly into Janey's ear:

"If they are the old original race, and we obtain access to their ancient records, no telling what we will find! I remember legends of terrific machinery. The *aroaksigs* were an ancient race and had some mighty science. No telling what might be lying about since their beginnings!"

Janey held her ear with one hand. "She told us some strange things about their cities. The ruins of the Fenir-dren are taboo still to the web-foots, you know, and these things aren't known generally. They had a power source not understood today, but the secret might be learned from the ruins. Their medicine was superior to the *aroaksig*, and they were the acknowledged masters of medicine on Venus for many centuries. The *aroaksig* doctors practiced in every ancient city."

Frank, listening to us with his mind, broke in. "We'll have no time for those things. The fact that the scheduled rocket from Earth didn't show up last week means things are mighty bad. Old Doc Allen told me they should have given it up months ago, according to his information from letters from doctors on Earth. If they had kept on, it was inevitable the plague would appear on Venus. It may show up here any time."

I knew they all had a picture of what the plague was like in their minds, but I had as yet to hear a description of the symptoms. I

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asked, "What is the plague like, Janey?"

"It starts with a terrific fever, and they just can't break it. The patient gets red and redder, then when he dies he slowly turns white as bone. They haven't even isolated the virus."

I grunted. I knew something about the medical drug cartels on Earth. They were probably trying to get the cure in some drug they could sell for a dollar a molecule, while the real cure was a stiff dose of common epsom or a bath in bichloride. Meanwhile the people died.

"If we do get the cure from these hidden people, we'll have to commandeer a rocket from the Corporation's field. They couldn't let us take off without orders, and how can they get orders when there's no rocket from Earth?"

Janey smiled grimly. "They'll let Frank take off, Hal."

I smiled, too. Most Eearth men had an exaggerated respect for Farar. Farar could have been elected president of Venus, if he had asked for it. The greenies would all vote for him too. To all of which he seemed oblivious, going his way silent and uncommunicative, talking only to the yarva minds.

Presently the little skin boat of the woman ahead swung off the mighty breast of the Granlee and headed up a tributary. It was pitch dark, and I was conscious of the change only by the feel of the paddle, the sensing of the river going away behind and the smaller stream ahead. This was the *Gran-nin*, and it led up into the mountains. Earth men had not yet renamed it, perhaps never would.

Ahead the woman flashed a little light. It swung about overhead, the thin beam penciling out the mighty branches of trees close overhead. We moored to a great limb almost touching the water, and the woman led the way, walking lightly up the slant of the mighty limb to where a little tree house waited the traveler. We slung hammocks from the hooks provided, were soon lost in sleep. All about the night life of the jungle roared and screeched, moaned and bellowed. In the river the great saurians courted and splashed—and to all of us it was but accepted background. Each of us knew that in the jungle it is the silence that betokens real danger.

* * *

SEVERAL days travel later, we pulled up at a tremendous stone wharf, mooring the canoes to great metal rings hanging uncorroded above the flood.

Beyond, under the vast, yet delicate fronds of the fern trees, loomed the quiet time-eaten grandeur of the forgotten city of the ancient Fenirdren. For long minutes we sat motionless, drinking in the overwhelming message of past glory stretching on and on beneath the vast

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plumes of scenery. Frank turned to me as we started to unload the canoes.

"Alinoa tells me the paths of this city are lined with death; a bloodthirsty thorn bush equipped with suckers at the base of the thorns. The limbs are under some inner tension that releases when you pass, so that the thorns whip around your legs. Men have been killed by them, strong and able men! So use your eyes, you and Janey."

The Hory birds seemed to have made the great empty city their headquarters also, swooping and screaming much too close about us as we invaded their sanctuary. Their hideous leather wings fanned the stench of the scavenger, their long spear-like beaks clashed their anger. The mist was full of them, diving, sensing our alien threat, wheeling in sudden indecision, screaming upward again. The most loathsome cry in the forest is the scream of the Hory birds, and here they lived in uncountable multitudes. Their cry was full of a terrible knowledge of their numbers, and each of us became newly aware of the horror that is the character of the bird—for if they descended on us in sudden swarming attack we would be torn into pieces in short minutes.

The medicine woman annointed each of us with a scent from a little earthen bottle from her capacious pouch. It was not a pleasant smell —the musk of the great saurians of the river—but it was one thing the Hory birds really feared. The great alligator-like beasts lie always beneath the surface of the river, their bright tongues extended and looking like a piece of freshly torn meat—and woe to the sudden dive of the bird who mistakes its appearance, for the great jaws snap shut about it instantly.

I would rather smell like an alligator than be a stain upon the ancient stone paths of the lost city of Kronad, I decided, wrinkling my nose as Janey's face grimaced at the smell.

These ruins were unlike any others I had seen on the planet, possessed of an immutable timeless quality, vast buttresses outlining some cavernous arch of a doorway, trees obscuring the details of the complex stylized ornamentation, cut into the stone intaglio, speaking to the eye of whirling motors in the hands of the artist.

The path led on and on into the forbidden city, and the constant threat of the angry swarms of leather-winged Hory birds, actually a kind of pterodactyl with spiny hair plumes on its red and ugly rear. At close quarters it is about the ugliest specimen of life in all the swarming jungles of the planet.

To keep an eye on the waiting traps set everywhere by the bent and hungry carnivorous thorn, to watch the swoop and disregard the

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ugly scream of the swarms overhead, to step exactly in the faint prints of the little feet of Alinoa, became an ordeal of strict attention to the necessary that left little time for the examination of the absorbing details of the ancient architecture. We passed wonder on wonder of wind-worn sculpture, luring doorway after doorway, on and on, the vast forms of the mighty structures becoming ever more fantastic about us, unable to look up and lose ourselves in the strangeness of the scene.

AT last we stood before a great circular structure, the thorn trees finally behind us, and the birds retreated to a higher level, the crush of limbs and plumed ferns overhead too thick for flight. Alinoa gave Farar a glance, and I knew there was a world of information in her mind then, but not a word of it could I catch. Behind me little Janey murmured calmly, unmoved by all the strain of our passage:

"This is the entrance to one of the ancient tunnels which leads to the city where her people now dwell . . . "

"Lord's mercy," I whispered, mopping my brow. "Another hour of that and I would have been ready to drop."

Janey snickered. "She just warned Frank that now the real danger begins! The *devalans* sometimes wait in this passage for the unwary foot!"

I groaned. "And what may a *devalan* be, Janey mine?"

"A devalan is a snake-like-a-mole-like-a-centipede - like - a - python, in your clumsy word talk."

"The vermin she wants us to kill!" I exclaimed. "Does she expect us to kill them without any more preparation than this? I couldn't throttle a butterfly with both hands, right now!"

Janey shickered some more. "O man of my unwise choice," she said in greenie words, which all of us sometimes used because of its containing so many words that English just doesn't have in stock, "we must pass this path of peril to reach safety, just as she did to bring us here. Where a mere woman can travel alone, are you, mighty hunter, fearful to enter? Lead on, a woman precedes you! Or must I perhaps push?"

She gave me a gentle shove, which shamed me into following the now almost invisible form of Alinoa into the dark, misted entrance, into a total blackness after the bright mist. I groaned.

I knew that Janey was humorously discussing my discomfiture with Frank in yarva talk, for he chuckled and called ahead, "Fear not, brave one; if anything eats you I will have revenge for you."

The medicine woman took out that little light of hers again, and

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in its slim pencil beam her face was a cameo cut out of ancient green glass as she murmured to me in the Fenir-dren, which is the mother-tongue of the greenie language:

"There is no danger if you but obey me. They will scuttle away into their holes unless they sense your fear. Bear always the thought that to you the *devalan* is quite vulnerable, it is a simple mind, and will believe the yarva thought you send."

Very simple instructions! All you have to do is not to worry as you walk through a pitch-black tunnel of unknown extent, following the faintest pencil gleam of light, and feel yourself invulnerable against a thing which was wiping out a people possessed of weapons still undiscovered by Earth men! I tried, and Janey snickered as she listened to my attempted bluffing of the unseen creatures.

Now and again, beside the graceful wraith ahead, I caught a glimpse of the ancient sculptures cut in the walls, speaking of an age of culture long passed away, speaking of wars and conquerings and ages of peace, speaking of the time when Venus was not a rain-drenched swamp but a planet of highly civilized humans. The dim form led on and on, a ghost from that past, through the maze of winding passages, built when the Fenir-dren had fled from the cataclysm of nature sweeping Venus. Just as it had swept earth, Venus had her flood in her past. Venus had gotten her weight of water out of space at that time, and had seen the face of the sun but seldom since. But in the days before that flood, Venus had not been only jungle and swamp and endless ocean.

Down here the civilizations of Venus had made their last stand against the forces of a nature gone wild, and in the end had lost. But some had lived on, and we were here to salvage just one needed remnant of that ancient wisdom, the cure for *one* disease unknown to man.

She spoke again, now realizing that I could not hear yarva, saying: "But a little way, my hunters, and we will be safe in the firelight."

To the natives of Venus, Farar was known as "the hunter." The other Earth men were called "the people of the glass houses." It somehow followed that Frank was about the only Earth man on Venus the Venusians considered qualified to throw a stone.

THE caverns began to betray signs of life, somewhere ahead a motor throbbed with power. We passed a brilliant doorway through which we caught a glimpse of a machine moving silently, the glow of molten metal and the smell of burning fuel, and I could have sworn that standing watch above

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the moving machine was the gigantic form of a robot. But either my imagination was running wild, or Janey and Frank knew it already, for they gave it not a glance.

We came at last to the living quarters of the strange transparent people, and were welcomed with the traditional glass of *grale-juice,* heart-warming and tongue-loosening. We sank wearily down on the soft furs of the long-haired mountain goat, called *dak* in Fenir-dren. The woman smiled down upon us from the doorway and dropped the smooth green skin across the opening, indicating that these rooms were ours to do with as we pleased. I fell asleep almost immediately, waking only to grumble as Janey pulled off my boots.

* * *

THE strange transparent heads of the council nodded all together, weirdly one in their movement, and I knew that so was their yarva strong and unified before Farar's inner eyes.

Frank spoke aloud, so that I might hear the palaver, know what was planned.

"For a price I will hunt out your devalans and destroy them, root and branch. That price is the health of my people on Earth. They perish of a strange disease, and in your medicine woman's mind I have seen knowledge of that disease still with us from the old time. I must have it all, to send back to my home world."

Frank and I knew they had foreseen his request before ever we tied up our canoes at the ancient wharf a day's trek away. This was but the customary rigamarole, ancient and unbreakable formality. It had all been decided before we arrived.

Frank translated their silent answer swiftly for my benefit.

"It may be that in our stored treasures of records from the past there is described a cure for this sickness. But it is also likely that the cause may be one unknown even to our ancient wisdom, what then?"

Frank smiled and sat down cross-legged upon the mat. "In that case, I will visit pleasantly with you, you are a hospitable race, and by and by I may get up and go to hunt your devalans. For there is no hurry, and my people far away will perish, for I can not help them."

"It would be very sad," the nodding glass heads were saying, "if you allowed us to be slain by the devalans for want of effort."

Frank nodded. "It would be sad, but what can I do. Life has no meaning when the race is dead. And presently the last of them will come here, fleeing the disease and bringing it with them, and all on Venus will perish too! It will be very sad, but why waste time on

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such little threats as the devalans when the greater plague is at hand. We must all die, does it matter how?"

The old heads nodded, the faces lit up with appreciation of his wisdom. "All is useless and the arm of the hunter becomes weak. The race of man is dead, and two worlds swing empty on their course. It will be sad."

"So must it be," agreed Frank. "Let us drink and be merry, for the time is short." He rose as if to go, but Alinoa glided forward as if a magnet drew her to his arms. They stood there in embrace, oblivious of the naked transparent heads of the circle of the council, their lips almost touching, their eyes somehow giving out a glow of some insupportable ecstasy. I felt it, knew it was my own weak yarva sensing the thing they were saying to each other with their eyes.

Frank suddenly turned his head to me, translating the words of the nodding council, who did not even lift their eyes to the two lovers before them, "First kill the devalans!"

And his answer he gave them, "First give the medicine lore for my people!"

The nodding heads of the ancient wise, the embracing lovers, myself sitting silent and ignored, wove themselves into an unforgettable scene as the will of Farar struggled with the ancient secretiveness of these hidden people.

At last the hand of the skeletal old figure in the center of the half circle of seated figures lifted, a hand thin and with the flesh so invisible that it was truly a skeleton in the light of the lamps.

Frank walked out with his arm about the lithe waist of their medicine woman, and I knew he had won. But I wondered how he meant to fulfill a promise to kill a tribe of creatures hiding in inaccessible rock burrows, unimaginable in their various talents! Rock-burrowing, silent in attack during sleep, thinking and organized as any savage tribe, armored with a hide impervious to the rock through which it burrowed, and equipped with teeth it used to crush rock fragments in clearing out its burrows!

I followed him out, wondering if perhaps he wasn't pulling a fast one. I didn't see how he meant to wipe out a race of things that lived in endless warrens of burrows no one of which was big enough to let in a man.

AGAIN in our quarters, the green-glass woman sank into a primitive chair of wood and leather. I bent beside her, to hear her yarva. Farar sat facing her, cross-legged on the floor.

Her statuesque head bent, her transparent brows knit as she concentrated on the complex thoughts

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which she must convey to a mind like Farar's, which had never before conceived the nature of the devalans.

"You do not know the devalan, and there is much to know. Our weapons are useless, for we cannot get close enough to use them. In them the yarva sense has reached a height beyond other species, they have no eyes, nor need of them."

Farar shook his head. "I cannot quite believe that, meaning no offense. No beast can be more sensitive than such triumphs of nature as your own selves! You mean they can outrange your yarva sense?"

"They attack when all are asleep, and race to their holes when anyone awakes. And always they take with them some of our number. We will not long survive—ten years, twenty, who knows when there will be no more of us?"

"On Earth," Farar said, "hunters use a small animal which they send into the burrows after quarry. Perhaps such an animal exists which might be used against the worms?"

The woman had an infinitely sweet, sad smile, and she shook her head, a resigned gesture of the defeated, like an Hypatia knowing the darkness ahead for all her people.

"There is no known animal can kill one. They multiply rapidly, and would over-run Venus but for the fact they often eat each other. The older eat the younger, and the males battle each other at mating season. But even so, their numbers grow. I have no hope, but Earthmen have always some new method for every problem, they are so young-minded . . . "

"Keep telling all you know about them," I asked, "and some little detail may give Frank or myself an idea."

"Their burrows underlie all these caverns we call home. The devalans follow them to some deep fastness where they breed and sleep all together in great masses, like snakes in a ball. One cannot get rid of ants by stepping on the few that appear on the floor. They must be struck at on their own grounds, where we cannot reach."

"Poison gas, smoke, water . . . " I asked.

"We have tried all three, with no results. The caverns they dwell in are so extensive, some deep draft carries gas and smoke away. Water they ignore. It is possible they can live underwater, I don't know."

Farar stood up. "We will have to shoot ourselves a couple of specimens. After we examine their bodies, it may be some weakness that you have overlooked will show itself."

The woman rose from the graceful leather seat, a deer hide stretched across a curved pair of tree crotches, hewed out and set together with perfect craftmanship. As she rose, she and Frank em-

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braced again, stood drinking in each other's face, so that I withdrew to leave them. I could not understand how Farar had come to leave such a treasure of a woman, one who so obviously thought the world of him. But I had much to learn about her people and their customs.

FRANK'S best rifle was an old Winchester Model '95, a .405 W.C.F. with lever action, using a special magnum cartridge he ordered from Earth. Frank did sometimes make his own cartridges out of used casings, but he did not consider his own dependable for anything but utility shooting. Today he opened a box still sealed, and I knew he expected to do some long range work.

Alinoa led us through two miles of clean, lived-in caverns, to enter a ruined section where quakes had sheared the borings, and rubble and rock falls choked the way. We had brought part of a deer carcass, which we set out for bait, and Alinoa and Janey crouched down behind us with their heads together to send out a yarva message calculated to bring the sensitive worms, a thought of meat and eating, visioned by Alinoa from her experience with the rock-worms. Janey reinforced the yarva and Frank and I leveled our rifles over a natural barricade of fallen rocks, waiting. A devalan appeared almost at once. I hated to think how close it must have been when we put out that meat.

My first sight of the thing gave me a bad case of buck fever, I fired three times with my fingers on the trigger guard and was sure I had killed him—then came out of it to realize there had been no report. That brought me to, and I sighted at the horror with my mind under control, refusing to think of the gray coils, the twenty-foot length, the eyeless flattened cone head with the awful mouth set with chisel-teeth that could crunch off rock, the strange flat rock-cutting paws made of some impossibly hard horny material that cut away rock as if the claws were tool steel. Moving with quick, darting, gliding motions, the huge thing came from the darkness suddenly, into the light Alinoa had set in the creviced roof, reared its head watchfully right and left. I knew that Janey and Alinoa were reading its rudimentary mind, smoothing away the fear-thoughts, making all seem right by careful suggestion.

On this trip I had brought two of my own guns, and I was using the heaviest, an ancient Garand I had picked up in our only gun shop on Venus. Some of the old black-tip armor-piercing cartridges had been available, and after experiencing on other trips with Frank some of the peculiar bullet-shedding talents of Venus' wild life, I had bought

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some. I doubt if there was a better gun available for the work in front of it than this gun with its armor-piercing load.

The reports of our two rifles, fired almost simultaneously, were deafening, and the sudden startled movement of the monster as the bullet struck made it impossible to see what effect we had made. The thing writhed backward in an impossible S turn, in an instant was almost invisible among the fallen rock. The tip of its tail made a sharp slapping noise as it shot into its burrow opening. Frank said: "Damn it all, we didn't drop him! I know where I hit him, square on the forehead where his eyes ought to be, and I swear it never fazed him!"

"These old armor piercers should have dented him. I aimed just back of the head. I believe I hit him twice, but it sure didn't bother him much. Let's see if we drew blood."

We moved forward, both of us conscious of the fact that our guns were most probably useless against the things if they chose to attack. Janey and Alinoa sat silent and waiting, still with their heads together. I guessed they were sending fear thoughts to the monsters, to keep them off us.

FRANK looked at me ruefully when we reached the bait. The thing had had time to take the bait with it! There was no blood we could find, and I picked up the bullets I had fired, bent out of shape, and examined them. Frank found his own, flattened completely, and looked at mine.

"Like spring steel, it gives enough to take the shock, and isn't pierced! First time I ever heard of a living animal with that kind of covering! This is going to be tougher than I expected."

I groaned. "Tough is the word for it, Frank! And if so much didn't depend on it, and time didn't matter . . . But we've got to do this in a hurry and get the cure, the drug—whatever it is—back as fast as we can make it. Now how can we figure out an animal like that in a hurry and exterminate him? We can't even get a specimen . . . "

Janey called shrilly: "Come back, don't stand there! That cavern is one of their little playgrounds and several of them are on their way to see what made all the racket! Let's get out of here with those popguns and hunt some nice humming birds."

Frank cocked an ear and started on a run and I scrambled after. Behind me I could actually hear the scrape of the emergence of one of them, but I didn't stop to look. We made our way back to the quarters given us by the Fenirdren, and we went fast.

"If we only had a vacuum cleaner," murmured Janey, bustling

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around the big room, setting our stuff to rights. There was a thin film of dust over everything, the place had been long unused.

Frank rubbed his nose with one thoughtful forefinger. "A vacuum cleaner, eh. I wonder!"

I looked at him. "If you *could* suck them out of their holes with a strong vacuum, what are you going to do with them after you get them out?"

Frank leaned back and grinned. "Ask Janey, it's her idea."

Janey laughed, eyes sparkling. "I picked up a long green snake in ours once, Hal, and when I emptied the bag, he was hamburger! See!"

I laughed, but a vacuum was no more use to us than a blower, and the Fenir-dren had already tried gas. But in the back of my head an idea was trying to get out. I tried to pin it down.

"In Africa, the natives sometimes poison water holes, and kill thousands of animals in a short time, after antelopes have spoiled their fields. If we could reach their water supply . . . "

Frank snapped his fingers. "Water seeks its own level. Treated water poured down their burrows should reach their water supply — if they drink water?"

Frank went silent for a few seconds, and I knew he was talking to Alinoa. He brightened, and the furrows went off his brow.

"They drink water, but the poisons that have been tried had no effect. I'll bet there is one they never tried . . . radioactivity! Nothing living can stand it!"

I sighed. "Just where do you plan to get a hundred pounds of uranium, or radium, or any other purified radioactive? When the A-bomb was perfected, the U.S.A. spent upwards of a billion dollars on the research alone!"

"On the refining plants, you mean! I don't think the research men ever got many millions of the money. You forget this is Venus; that there are ores here never reported, that I know things about this planet no other white man knows. I know that Alinoa can get radioactive minerals."

"Look Frank," I said, hoping to avert what I knew could be the finish of us, "whatever you put down these holes, the chances are the things will be driven upward to escape it. And when those numbers come, you can't protect yourself or anyone! First you've got to get something that will stop them. That takes a gun like the bazooka, and it takes men trained to use it. We don't have either!"

Frank didn't look discouraged. His eyes were very confident, a little amused. "We do have *oil*. There is a pool of it drained from some oil shale outcrop on the mountainside. And these people are metal workers. We should be able to improvise a few flame throwers,

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for our protection, if we do drive them up. That is worth trying. If it doesn't work, we'll really have to think hard."

THERE were four or five hundred of Alinoa's tribe, when we got them all together. They were a fine, large people, handsome and sturdy, a little shy from the centuries of secrecy and hiding. Frank showed them how to make a wooden pipeline by splitting logs, hollowing out the centers, banding them back together with hoops of iron. Fortunately the pool was high; if we had had to improvise pumps it would have stumped us. Working in shifts, we finished the pipe line for the oil right down to the cavern where Frank and I had failed to kill the devalan.

Meanwhile Frank had been busy with the oldsters in their shops, in the area of the caves through which we had passed when we arrived. We had seen the metal smelting, and there were some complicated and peculiar machines still operating from the long ago. The Fenir-dren metal workers were a clique, a little guild of about thirty old timers who allowed only one apprentice to join them each year. They knew a great deal, and at the same time their ignorance was abysmal. For in those caverns were halls of ancient machinery, museums of relics from far antiquity, of which they were totally ignorant because of a taboo.

There, they manufactured the little poison needle gun which was the fore-runner of the Carian needle gun with explosive needles. It was nearly as good a weapon, but the poison was slower acting by far. With it, they got about as good results as Earth's South American aborigines with the blow-gun.

They made hoops for their wheeled wooden carts, parts for harness for the tame deer they used for beasts of burden and for food and the green leather of which they made so many things. They made a pretty fair iron axe for chopping fuel, and a war-club of iron with edges all along it, like a *maquahitl*, but a lot more effective. They turned out several kinds of breast plates for warfare. Actually the Fenir-dren had little use for most of these things, shunning all physical contact with other races as they would the plague. The metal workers kept the ancient art alive, but that was all.

Though some of the ancient complicated machines were in use, they did not understand them. They used a steam hammer that was standing there when Noah didn't even have a canoe. They had replaced the original furnace with a crude furnace of brick and clay, and a boiler salvaged from some antediluvian junk pile. With it they shaped the more refractory bits of blacksmithing.

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All about, shrouded in the dust of time, stood relics of the past that historians and ethnologists and similar students of Earth would have given a right arm to see . . . and they didn't even know they were of value to anyone.

It was into this atmosphere of forgotten knowledge and long past science that Frank strode, determined to improvise out of whatever was handy a modern flame thrower for battle against a creature which even a flame might not stop. It had to be a mighty good flame thrower—and it had to use raw crude petroleum.

THE night we finished the pipe line I was sitting in our quarters, tuckered out, trying to wish up energy to crawl into the blankets. Frank walked in, threw himself into that same leather and wood seat that Alinoa graced when she called. His brow was corrugated like a tile roof, and so dirty you could have planted potatoes in the furrows.

"What's got you down, as if I didn't know?" I asked.

"I've got everything but a portable air pressure for the flame throwers. How do they make a flame thrower that carries its own pressure? It's too much for me!"

I grinned, and rubbed it in a little. I don't get a chance to rib Frank often; he's usually a jump ahead. "They built flame throwers back in nineteen seventeen, more than a century ago! You don't mean to tell me that you don't know as much as an engineer of that ancient vintage? Impossible!"

"I can throw a flame," he went on, ignoring my words, "but I have to use an air compressor I built out of some of the old junk laying around. It's so damn heavy it takes ten men with ropes to move it, and I put wheels on it. But if we have to cover a retreat with that thing, and it only pumping air for one or two flame throwers, we'll be in a fix. I've got to figure out a flame-thrower a man can carry. And doggone me if I know enough!"

"It takes a lot of air to burn that crude oil, Frank. The old timers didn't use fuel oil, they used gasoline, and the pressure of the burning gases threw the stuff—it burned mostly at the perimeter of the blast, where the air could get at the hot gases. Your principle is wrong for a portable device. But I can't see how you're going to get around it."

"I think they used oxygen tanks, liquid oxygen," he mused. "How in time could we manufacture liquid oxygen with our non-existent equipment?"

I sighed. "Give it up, Frank. We'll only get ourselves killed trying to handle those rock-boring monsters. Put your friend Alinoa off with the explanation, wheedle her cure out of her, and we can go

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back to our mine. There, we transmit what we have learned to Earth, and manufacture weapons to kill off the rock-worms. Then we come back, properly equipped, and do the job right."

Frank looked at me, and I felt a little stupid not to know it couldn't be done that way.

"It's the oldsters! They won't let us have the records, and Alinoa doesn't know the exact details of the treatment. We can't wait. If our reports on the progress of the plague on Earth are correct, Earth will be depopulated in the time it will take us to go back to headquarters and return here. It's the time element, Hal! We've got to finish them off fast, and every day's delay means Earth has lost another big fraction of her people. They won't give us the data we need until we do the job, and we just can't wait to get equipment to do it right!"

I leaned back, seeing now much more clearly what he was trying to do. I suggested, "Then just let the oil run down the holes into their nests, Frank. Oil itself is pretty poisonous stuff."

"That would only bring them out, if it bothered them at all. And we can't kill them — they'd kill us. We've got to figure something!"

I started to think out loud.

"Neither of us is a first-rate engineer, Frank. We don't even know our own mining operations as we should! My brother was the guy who really discovered our lode. We've got to figure out something primitive, something positive and simple, that we can understand well enough to do it correctly. Now think about this p.an . . .

"Manufacture a large number of simple smoke bombs, you know, a *colinoa* shell with a fire inside, with little holes for air. The natives float them on the water when they're fishing, to keep the mosquitoes off. They're just flax-weed packing, soaked with fish oil, and they burn for hours. We roll one of them down every burrow we can find, then start pouring in the oil. The oil will reach some big opening below and gather there, and the smoke bombs will float on top of the oil. If I know anything, one or more of those bombs will set the surface of the oil afire, and with so many burrows in and out, you will have the equivalent of a huge pot, similar to the pot in an oil burning furnace. Air will come, and it will find a chimney effect from these burrows. It will make its own draft. Result, the whole underground they live in will get too hot to hold them. So maybe what's left will try to reach the surface. The burrows they try to crawl up will be chimneys of carbon monoxide. If any do reach the caverns of the Fenir-dren, they'll not be thinking of battling anybody or anything."

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It was this plan we adopted. Frank only insisted on placing his huge air tank and flame thrower in the big tunnel where we had entered the cavern into which the burrows opened. If they *did* come up fighting, we would have the flame to hold them back while the rest of the Fenir-dren escaped.

The members of the council came to watch our final preparations, and then departed with ill-omened shakings of the wise old heads. I suppose they went back and gathered their belongings together and started off for a safer place.

The smoke bombs burned all right. We rolled the big hollow shells, giving off smoky clouds, down every burrow we could find. Then we passed hollow wooden tubes to each of a dozen burrows, and let in the oil from our main pipe line. Then we moved back to Frank's flame thrower to await developments.

At first nothing happened, and in front of us the reach of vacant rubble-strewn cavern stretched empty, the air layered and heavy with the smoke from lighting the smoke bombs. After a bit this still air began to move, and I gave a cry of delight. "The oil has caught, man! The draft is beginning!"

As the minutes passed, the flow of air became a wind about us. Then it was no longer air, but gases, heavy with the smell of burning oil, and increasing steadily in temperature. We rolled the improvised compressor back and back, till we found an intersection of the tunnel where the heated gases found their natural chimney upward. There we made our stand about a score of the transparent Fenir-dren, in war-paint and feathers, carrying battle axes of iron, with breast and leg plates gaudy with gold paint.

Two of us turned the big wooden wheel that kept the air pressure up in the ancient tank on wheels, and Frank held the nozzle, twin tubes of metal, one carrying air and the other oil. The cart held a huge hollow log filled with crude oil, and there was another piston type pump with a painted warrior ready to work the piston that forced the oil into the air stream. It was just a crude blow-torch, but it threw a fifteen foot flame, and Frank thought it would stop a worm. We didn't know yet.

The great tunnel into which we peered, waiting a rush of the monsters to escape, became a dim red from the heated gases pouring up in a steadily increasing stream. The fact there was yet little smoke I knew was favorable, it meant the inpouring oil flood was getting plenty of air for its burning. The burrows of the enemy must be getting uncomfortable—and the success of our scheme depended entirely on the layout of those burrows, a thing we could only guess

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at, and not know surely.

WE had just about given up and decided to go home and await results in more comfortable surroundings, when the first mad devalan boiled up out of one of those smoking chimneys and came for us like a bolt of gray and horrible lightning. Frank held his big iron tube to the torch we had kept lit, and the feathered warrior gave the piston handle one push. The oil lit, and I turned on the air pressure a little, hoping against hope we wouldn't have to face this oncoming twenty-foot eyeless thing with no flame. The flame shot out a good five feet and I turned the air on full as Frank swung the flame to meet the oncoming writhing destruction.

The flames boiled out, wreathed in black greasy smoke, completely hiding the onrush of the thing. The whole tunnel in which we stood was filled in front of us with flame. We stood pumping, and each of us must have felt sure that mighty armored worm was going to come right on through the flame. Frank shut down his own air control a second, and the flame shrank back.

Just about six feet from Frank the huge thing lay, whipping back and forth in torture, its whole tremendous length scorched black—and still very much alive! It was pain alone that had stopped him, the heat of the burning oil had penetrated that hide-armor deep enough to give him probably his first dose of pain in his life. He went through the same kind of contortions a fishworm going on a fish-hook usually performs.

We didn't have time to wait and see if one dose was fatal, for out of the burrows that lined that now superheated section of cavern came more and more of them, writhing up and out, heads swinging right and left—and then the dash toward us.

Frank swung up the flame, letting them have it, banking the flame against the wall to see the effect, and then back again as more and more of the things piled up just in front of him. The pile of madly contorting monster flesh grew so high we had to roll the whole clumsy heavy equipage back, with much straining and heaving—and Frank burned them down as they swarmed over the top until the cavern was full to the roof and no more came through.

I groaned, "I hope that that is that . . . "

Frank, his face covered with soot out of which his eyes gleamed with the old demon gleam of the hunter facing his prey, turned to bellow, "That *isn't* that! They'll be coming upon us from another way! We might as well back up to the next intersection. These things may number in the thousands and we may be at this for days! Just roll

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her back to our next post. You'll be able to tell it by the nozzle and valve on the pipe line."

He was right. At the intersection they were already approaching, in serried ranks, an army of what I felt sure must be thinking creatures. Creatures knowing they had to reach and kill us or die. Those rock crushing teeth gnashed with a roar from hundreds of them, far as eye could reach in the murk. Those terrific tails drove them onward, the bodies writhing altogether, curve on curve like the waves of a sea of horrible flesh. Military organization, it looked like. Perhaps those we had met before had been the civilians, and now they had called out the shock troops as a kind of national emergency measure. I laughed at the word. For them it was emergence into the upstairs or die of the vast flames spreading everywhere below.

Frank filled the opening of the intersecting tunnels with the flame, and the transparent warriors pumped the hand wheel furiously. The smoke and fumes were unbearable, driven back upon us by the onrushing force which pushed the very air ahead of it with its volume.

The first ones reached the flame, and came on and on, a thin inaudible screaming coming out of the great mouths, heard mentally only. The bodies thrashed and quivered and piled up, and over the top rolled the next wave into the flame. Then the inevitable happened — the improvised air pump decided to spring a leak!

THE pressure dropped until Frank had only a feeble four foot flame in his hand, and on came the writhing worms, eyeless, horrible, reaching out with those flattened conical heads . . .

It was no use. Frank was going to stand and take that charge of death, and go down — the thing wasn't sense! I grabbed the big pipe from his hands and threw it at the oncoming horde. Then we ran, unashamedly, all the half score of us, leaving the flame-thrower and the scene as fast as legs could carry us.

"No use dying just because your make-shift weapon conked out," I yelled in Frank's ears.

He didn't answer, saving his breath for running.

On came the army of terrible rock worms, filling the cavern behind us, sweeping on almost as fast as we ourselves could run. To me it looked like Venus was going to experience a coming-out party it would not forget — and if those worms discovered the surface people could not kill them, it could well mean the end of man on Venus.

Frank, running beside me with his face black as coal and his eyes and teeth gleaming out like a Demon fleeing Hell, full of the thrill

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of danger and the immense kick he always gets out of pitting himself against the impossible, yelled in my ear: "The fat's in the fire, now! They may overrun the whole planet!"

As we emerged from the ruined section of cavern into the inhabited portion, Alinoa was waiting for us. In her hand was a torch, and beside her an ancient and huge metal brazier, and as we came up to her she touched the torch to the contents. A thick, white, sweetish smoke issued from it in volumes, quickly filling the cavern. She explained.

"It is a scent they find irresistible. It is to them as catnip to the cat."

As we ran on, we saw the wisdom of the act, for the creatures stopped at the smoke, and we could see them milling about, crawling over each other in a mad frenzy to get nearer the big brazier. It gave us time to make good our escape.

The living caverns of the Fenirdren were empty of life. My heart was wrenched when I realized that our actions had driven them from their homes into what might well be permanent exile. At that, they would be better off than waiting around for the devalans to pick them off in their sleep, one by one.

The passage to the opening in the ancient city we covered in a third the time we had used in entering. The paths through the thorn-grown streets of the dead city we ran through at a good clip, treading on each other's prints exactly to avoid the deadly spring of the thorn branches. Janey followed Alinoa and I followed Janey, Frank brought up the rear. Ahead of Alinoa ran one painted warrior, I suppose he was her appointed guard who went first to make sure nothing happened to her in traversing the dangerous paths of the city. Overhead the Hory birds screamed and swooped in greater numbers than before, but we were too much worried about the writhing horrors on our trail to worry about the diving, screaming freaks from the past. I laughed as I imagined a Hory bird trying to sink a tooth in the hide of a rock-worm, and yowled as a whipping thorn scraped past my shin, leaving a row of scratches such as a wildcat might have made, I quit thinking then, and concentrated on putting my feet exactly in Janey's prints.

OUR long outrigger was already in the water and the greenie who had remained to guard it in place, paddle in hand. Yarva has its blessings. His homely mug was full of anxiety for our safety. I wondered what his name was, for yarva makes names and such personalities rather useless. Many greenies have no genuine given name—one "knows" them, and that

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is sufficient.

That trip down the River of Doubt! One would have sworn the things knew intelligently exactly what we had done to them and meant to have their revenge. I asked Janey if that were true, and she said: "Individually they are not very bright, but they have a kind of group consciousness, to which they are linked by their high sensitivity in yarva communication. That mass consciousness knows its home has been destroyed, knows that vast numbers of its members have died in agony—and knows we are responsible. They will not give up pursuit until we are dead—or they are!"

Along the visible bank of the great river the gray and horrible shapes poured steadily, their energies inexhaustible. I suppose a body that can store energy to use in boring a hole through solid rock would find travel in the surface forest a nothing. Paddle as swiftly as we might, with the great sluggish current adding its flow to our speed, they kept pace easily.

Frank was like a man with his arms cut off, finding his beloved rifles useless against them. He would glance at his guns, lying wrapped at his feet, and his eyes would swing to the marching tide of gray and hideous flesh pouring along just visible through the river mists. Once he put down his paddle, picked up his rifle and sighted carefully, fired. I wondered if he had decided the area just back of the head might be vulnerable, for one of the great gray worm beasts in the front tide reared, and that inaudible scream that one could yet hear in the mind came at us across the water.

"You hurt him, Frank! Where did you hit him?" Frank lay the gun down disconsolately.

"He kept on going. I must have touched a part that bruised, but it sure didn't stop him."

He did not fire again, and to me it was the height of foolishness to think of hurting an army of monsters of that number. How many there might be we had no way of knowing. They were out for our blood. Janey could hear it. Frank could hear it, and in the skin boat ahead of us Alinoa and her guard, and all of them thinking the same thing. I knew it for a fact, hearing it with yarva the way they did.

A deadly intent animated that on-driving mass, the waves of its movement rhythmic as marching feet, on and on. Trees crackled as their weight passed, crackled and fell upon them without harming them. I knew they must be leaving a track broad and smooth as a highway, every plant and unevenness of the ground crushed and flattened. As far as eye could see through that mist of Venus, there was only the steady waves of gray flesh.

"See if you can yarva their num-

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bers," I asked Janey, remembering how she could make a person think of something she wanted to know. She looked at the things, reaching out, her face expressionless yet filled with a loathing as her mind touched that mass-mind of the worms.

"They don't *know* numbers, Hal," she answered, at last. "They are the only 'people.' They live in the rocks, and every other living thing is a *lesser* thing. They think that all rock everywhere is filled with their burrows, so it seems they have never entered rocks where there were no burrows of their ancestors. They live for centuries, time seems to have little meaning to them. And none of them knows of a place in the rocks where there are no rock-worms. So there must be millions! But we have angered only a portion. They call themselves Zan, a tribe or colony. There are many other tribes, but we have harmed the *Zan*, and we must die."

I nodded, looking at Frank. He had probably gotten all that long ago for himself; so I said nothing. We just plied the paddles, fleeing down the river, and our plans were only to place distance between ourselves and that army of writhing things. We were not succeeding!

Ahead of us, in Alinoa's light skin boat the two transparent people paddled easily. They could have left us, gone where the others had gone, for their boat was much faster than ours. I wondered where the rest of Alinoa's people were?

I was just about to ask, when I realized that they might have escaped the notice of the worm's minds, and that mention of them might bring down upon them the vengeance they had escaped so far. I looked at Janey, and she shook her head slightly. I knew I was not to think of them again in any way. So I knew that the others of our party were carefully erasing thoughts of the rest of the transparent people from their minds, in order to keep the worms from learning of their new location.

AS before a forest fire, animals fled from the advancing host in a mad rout of panic. Tall-necked saurians, the felar of Venus, a kind of snake-giraffe, crashed along in blind running panic—and that was a beast that feared no living thing. Running among them were the little green-hided reptilian deer of Venus, the felar's natural prey, their mutual feud forgotten in their desire to escape the gray ranks of the rock-worms' advance. The red-striped land-eels, a formidable fighter, wove their fantastic hued forms among the running shapes, making good time for a thing with legs so small and short. And over the whole mad rout the Hory birds dived and screamed and whirled madly, a macabre dance as of dried bodies of hideous bats whirled by the wind. The incredible plumed

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bird life winged among the Hory birds, safe now in the general mad excitement, making long curved lines of lovely flight through the ugly up and down dance of the Hory birds. The whole forest was moving, fleeing the steam roller of incredibly heavy life boiled out of the burrows by the burning oil of Farar's attack.

"They're definitely following us?" I asked Janey, unbelievingly.

"Wherever we go, there will the Zan go," she said to me, absently, watching the tremendous spectacle, more frightening than a forest fire, more terrifying than a tornado, more resistless than a tidal wave. And that terrific manifestation of nature on the rampage was following us!

Our two little vessels swung on, paddles dipping steadily, the vast breast of the river breathing up its spirals of soft mist, the great trees bending, quivering their awareness of the ground tremors of the marching rock-worms. Past the wide branch of black water that marked the water-way leading into Granlor, where the "Worran and Farar Mining Company" compound lay, on down the great River of Doubt toward the distant sea. I didn't ask a question as we passed the turn-off toward home, for I knew that whatever was in Farar's mind must not even be thought of clearly, or the worms would yarva a warning from his thought, and take a counter-measure. I realized he must have conceived of some trap to lead that terrible pursuit toward, but I banished the thought firmly, and Janey nodded approval.

"The river was never so welcome a highway as this trip, knowing the things cannot travel upon it too," she remarked to me, to keep the conversation going and so distract my mind from thoughts that would not help our case.

ONE of two of us was always awake while the others slept. The days fled by in a nightmare of weary travel, one like the other, and still the scene was unchanged in its terrifying movement and power. The chase went on, and we were the pursued. The Zan meant to follow to the ends of the planet if necessary.

At last we came to the broad restless face of the "big-water," the sea of Sunon. Frank turned the dug-out along the coast, close to the white sands, and we made rough going with the waves tossing us badly. The skin boat of Alinoa had to be abandoned, it was no craft for this water, and she and her companion came into the dug-out.

On along the coast; and I blessed the outrigger Frank had put on that frail shell of wood again and again as the thing swayed and tossed and tipped. The great gray worms came out on the white beach

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into complete visibility, sweeping onward in a tide of vindictive might.

One could never get a real idea of their numbers as they always stretched on into the limits of visibility, the fog cutting off the sight. I could not help constantly wondering what sanctuary we were heading toward, what place on the world was going to be safe for us with this pursuit was beyond my guess.

The Kolian peaks thrust up tremendously now on our right, and between their abrupt shoulders and the beach was only a thin belt of ancient trees. Through these trees and upon the beach the worms marched now. They were timing their progress by ours exactly. Into the Bay of For-param, following the beach, and so into the mouth of the tide-water reaches of the River of Am, where it makes a little sea of its own, a place forbidden because of the things that live in its warm brackishness. It was a stretch of water I had never seen, for no boat ever approaches the River of Am or enters For-param. I knew there was some particularly vicious life that nested there, but I could not for the life of me recall, if I had ever heard, just what.

Frank gave me one look, the old demon gleam of the hunter's eye about to close on his quarry, and I knew that here he expected some crucial test of his hidden plan—and I knew from that demon-gleam that we were all in deadly peril and to be on my toes. The dug-out swept on, making good time with the wind behind us and the waves thrusting us along, slapping the stern. It was a scene of true primeval beauty. No greenie, even, had ever ventured to build a hut in one of these vast forest giants crowding right down to the water's edge—as if to thrust back the very sea with their strength. There was a waiting threat here, a venomous, taut waiting, as if the forest itself was sheltering with its spread of greenery some last protector, some ancient power that would forever keep out man and all his works.

It was just the kind of place I would have expected Frank to flee to in last extremity, a place where no one but a child of the forest itself could ever have felt safe. The quietness of the vast aisles of tree boles, the waiting of the tossing branches, restless, knowing, and biding their time, told me that some thing was hidden here too great to fear even the rock-worms.

I felt that here Frank expected some titan of the unknown wilderness to rear up and strike at the onrushing worms. The wind and waves had thrust us ahead of their march now. They came on, swarming along through the brushy undergrowth, crushing over the open places where the soft green sod disappeared beneath their weight. Frank checked the progress of the

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dug-out, put up his paddle, picked up his rifle.

He fired one shot into the air, the echoes rolling and bouncing again and again from the vast sides of the Kolians, dying down at last in the far passes of the mountains beyond sight. Then he wrapped the rifle up again and put it away.

Frank swung his head from its intent watch of something I could not even guess, and gave me a few words—"Watch. You'll see something few men have seen and lived to tell about it."

"And hold still!" Janey admonished. "No one of us is to move until he gives the word."

THE worms were milling now, spreading out in a great circular clearing where the beach pushed up along a small brook between the great slopes of the mountainside. Here some thing had kept the tree growth back through all the reach of the brook, up to where it bounded from the rocks and fell in a long arch from the cliffs above. I guessed that the clearing was underwater part of each year. Now its grasses and clean white sands were covered swiftly over with the slowly milling worm forms, circling and spreading out, gathering and waiting for us to come to them. We did not mean to do so.

It was evident to me that these things hated water. None of them so much as wet a side in the low-breaking surf. Not once had one of them ventured into the water or even taken a drink in all that march of days on end, that I had seen.

"Don't they even drink?" I murmured to Janey, but she only shushed me softly and I shut up, anything that could make Janey that quiet was dangerous.

Now far-off I could discern a movement among the trees, the tops swaying and lifting, some vast thing or things rushing through the branches, drawing nearer and nearer, and I cursed my mind blindness that would not let me reach out and sense what it was, as the others were doing. Their faces blanched, their hands clenched on the gunwales. The paddle dropped from Janey's hand with a little clatter into the bottom of the boat. I could only wonder, not even break the terrible quiet with a query.

Then out of the tree tops burst form and movement, a thrusting upward and a leaping forward, vast lengths and reaches of IT, racing forward terribly, eager as mink is eager for blood, a snouting and lusting sound coming from IT, like great smacking lips and swallowings.

In spite of myself I burst out, "What in Hell IS it?"

No one answered me, all were frozen in the terrifying waiting of that coming of the great thing or things. On it rushed, mottled tenta-

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cles or many bodies thrusting eyelessly forward, ridged across the bottom parts, mottled over with green and brown and vivid tiny lines of blood red.

If it had been motionless you would have sworn it was all tree limbs; but in motion, you would have sworn the mightiest python of all time was trying to go off in all directions at once.

Closer and vaster it came, and I saw that it was not one, but many, not serpent either, but great lengths of powerful flesh, legged with vast short legs like a cat's, clawed and powerful. Its many backs arching gave the illusion of one serpentine length. It was a horde of elongated cats, yet not cats. As they swept closer, I saw it was a pack, a hunting pack, summoned by the rifle shot and sweeping down for the kill.

There was a kind of serpentine cat form, that ran in packs in these forests of the unknown Kolian mountains, a vast stretch of country which the greenies sedulously avoided. I knew that here was one of things Frank knew about Venus that no one else knew. No Earth man had ever entered these forests and returned but Frank. This was the master life form of these forests, things huge as a truck-and-trailer, that ran through the vast trees in hunting packs that no other life could ever approach and still escape. One of the monstrous tree dwellers leaped in a great arc out over the rock-worms' milling mass, a leap of fifty feet at least, clear from a hundred and fifty foot forest giant's limbs onto the backs of the worms.

The weight of it was so enormous that the whole tree bent and leaped back as it sprang, and as it landed on those stubby, enormous clawed limbs on the backs of the worms, it went into action.

Moving swift as a weasel, its tail whipping like a flail, its forepaws cuffing and crushing, and in its mouth already one of the rock-worms, like a fish-worm in a chicken's beak. It had thrown itself into combat as if to a feast!

WE had all crouched lower and lower in strain as the great tree-springing swarm of life had neared, and were now, but four heads peering fascinated over the boat's edge. No man had ever seen a battle like this—before nor since. The rock-worms indestructibility had been put to a test by Frank's knowledge of the forests, and here it met its match!

Those vast shovel jaws of the tree monsters crushed down on the worms, and blood flowed. It was a red blood, like any other! More and more leaped down as the pack joined in. The beach was a thrashing mass of embattled titans, the worms retreating along the beach their flattened cone heads striking

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deep wounds into the sides of the tree-dwellers, their rock-crushing teeth tearing and tearing at the bulk of the tree-monsters, but themselves crushed by the great cat-paws. No matter how tough their hide, the understructure of their bodies gave way completely from the terrific crushing power of the giant blows.

I was burning with questions to ask Frank about them, and did not dare to open my mouth for fear of attracting the blood-thirst of the creatures; a blood-thirst like a weasel's, I saw, that would stop at nothing if it scented blood.

I knew a lot about Venus, as much as any other Earth man but Frank, and here was a terrific monster I had never heard of. Frank gave me a glance, his face flushed over with the thrill and terror and drama of the terrible battle, his eyes gleaming with that triumph of the hunter that is like no other in its fierce satisfaction.

* * *

GOING back, we paddled slowly, wearily. There were no vengeful Zans on our trail. In fact, there were no Zans! The tree-cat pack had eaten them like lobsters. After the bloody feast, they had gone, swiftly bounding again into their trees and racing off through their sheltering branches, highway and home and roof to them, death to all others on Venus!

At last I could hold it no longer. "Why didn't you ever tell me about those things, Frank?"

Frank, himself now and paddling calmly, gave a little laugh. "You wouldn't have believed me, Hal. And there is no way of showing the things in that forest to anyone —they wouldn't live through the trip. The first time I saw them, I was lost, heading for the sea, trying to get to Param down the coast. I knew it was bad country, but I didn't know how bad till one of those things poured itself out of a tree next to me and gulped down a big amphibian that had come out to browse. It was one of the croc-nosed saurians, and it looked like a fighter, but it never had a chance. I sat for as long as two days, motionless, waiting for them to move on without noticing me. I never spent as bad a time as I did when I first ran into those monsters—and I have never been back to Forparam since. Nor will I again, except for some necessity like this."

Janey, still pale after the ordeal, but otherwise standing the strain of the long journey well, laughed too, with Frank. It was a kind of hysteria of relief that ran through us all, so that Alinoa and her transparent escort joined in and all of us laughed together, helplessly.

I wiped my eyes, asked, "Just what *is* so funny, anyway?"

Janey said, "I think it's because Frank had all this happen to us so he could take Alinoa to Earth with him."

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"Did he really, Janey? Did he plan it this way?"

Janey nodded. "I have yarva'd him pretty carefully, and he's a little too pleased about it all. He hoped it would work out so he could separate Alinoa from her tribe and have her to himself, and he did it. Don't you know him by now?"

I laughed again, not with relief, but just with knowing Frank had got his way against the impossible again. Then a thought struck me, and I asked in English, "How about the big bruiser with her; won't he object?" Janey shook her head.

"He's her brother, silly! Didn't you know even that? He is also a medicine man, like herself, and he came along as guardian of the tribal treasures, the records in that roll hanging from his neck. I keep forgetting to tell you everything—I expect you to pick up something once in a while. It's hard to remember you're the same as deaf."

I cogitated the new information. "That I should have known all along." I looked at Janey. "Let's go along. You've never been to Earth, and you don't have to be afraid of the plague any more."

Janey gave a cry of complete indignation. "What, leave Venus, where I'm safe, for the awful old Earth! Why, Hal Worran, I'll never go there!"

I slapped my brow. "Venus, where she's *safe!*"

To Janey, raised on Venus, our recent adventures were the normal course of affairs, and civilization was a conglomeration of unknown terrors!

We stayed on Venus. The "primitive" medicine woman of an obscure jungle tribe took a rocket to Earth to tell earth scientists how to cure a plague.

Yes, Frank and Alinoa came back married. They now live in a gigantic tree house Frank had built by the greenies, according to his specifications. It is a mile away, on the edge of Granlor. The webfoots call it the "Palace of the Hunter." Like Alinoa, the palace is also "anban," taboo to all theft or unnecessary contact by the greenies. In fact, I believe the Palace of the Hunter and his mate is a lot safer place to be than a plastic compound. It's a lot pleasanter, too.

THE END

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LETTERS (*Continued from page* 121)

former editor of AS I'm sure you realize, as many of us do, that Rog is one of the most promising stf writers yet.

Captain Ham: Enjoyed this one too. I haven't read much of the De-Courcys' work but after this I would like to.

The Starting Over: I nearly dropped dead laughing at the ending of this one.

After reading two paragraphs of Brown's story I gave it up as being unworthy of any more time. The departments were wonderful; don't drop any of them. The mag could stand a better grade of paper and a much longer letter column. Keep improving as fast as you have been, and I'll keep buying.

26601 S. Western
Apt. No. 341
Lomita, Calif.

Since you enjoyed The Starting Over so much, I'm sure you've already discovered that the unpredictable Archie continues his adventures in this issue. Author Winsell reports that he paid Jinnegans Juice Joint a visit on his vacation, so we should be hearing more of the mishaps of Archie and Sam in the future.—Ed.

Nick Solntseff

I would be very much obliged if you will print the following announcement in the letter column of OTHER WORLDS.

I would like to make the announcement that the first Australian post-war fanzine has been published. It is called WOOMERA and is a 12-page zine, duplicated on semi-foolscap paper. It features articles by both US and AUST. fans and is of general interest. Its price is one prozine for two issues or copies. When sending your sub., please mention whether you want one issue or two. Also note that surface mail takes about 2 months to reach Australia from the US.

The Editor is Nick Solntseff, Address: 184 Girraween Rd., Girraween, N.S.W., Australia.

Contributions to the zine are needed badly. If you have an article written and want to publish it, send it to the above address. Outstanding short stories accepted. Stories must not be above 2000 words in length.

Thanks for the above. I hope you have good luck with OW. I have managed to get the first two issues from the US, through a friend of mine. And I'll frankly say that your magazine is great.

I'll take the opportunity, here, to say that I enjoyed both of Rog Phillips' yarns, especially THE MIRACLE OF ELMER WILDE in No. 1. In the second issue DESCENT FROM MERA is easily outstanding.

The PERSONAL column in the mag is a very good idea. I'll be using it soon as I have a lot of back-date magazines to obtain. Because of stf scarcity in Australia I have missed many issues.

Thanks for publishing this letter, and I hope that someday it will be possible to subscribe to your magazine direct from here.

184 Girraween Rd.
Girrameen, N.S.W.
Australia

We seem to be getting letters on an international scale for this issue, England, Hawaii, and now Australia. Thanks for your good wishes concerning OW, and we'll return the compliment by wishing you success with WOOMERA. We're sure you'll be hearing from U.S. fans in the matter of subscriptions and material for your fanzine.—Ed.

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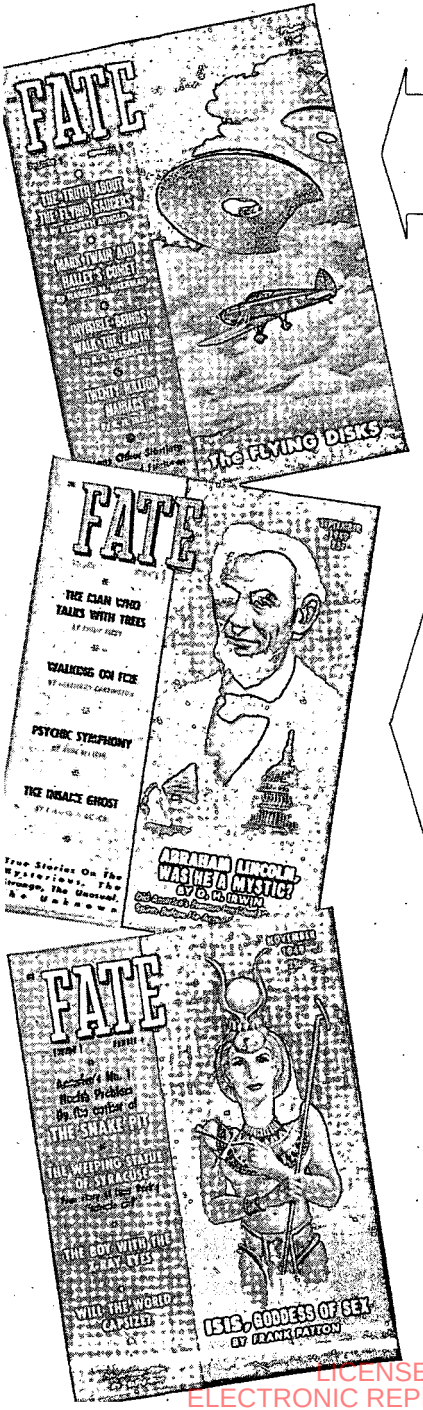

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